THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN BRISTOL

1910 - 1939

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by

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NOTE ON SOURCES

A Note on Sources

The quality of the material available for research into the history of the Bristol Labour movement is very varied. Wartime bombing and years of neglect have deprived us of the records of key areas of the local movement, such as those of the Trades Council, and of almost all the copies of a local Labour publication, the Bristol Labour Weekly, which was published from 1926 until sometime in the 1950s. Odd trades union branch minute books have been preserved, but rarely can we find a complete record of the activities of even one trade union branch over the whole of our period. The same is true of Labour party records. Moreover, such material as does exist is highly scattered, and one of the major tasks in this work of research has been to search out and assemble the material.

Little Labour movement material has yet found its way into the City Archives Office, and much of that which has is of mainly memento value. On the other hand, the Frank Sheppard papers have been deposited in the Archives, and have yielded many valuable primary sources. There is also a minute book of a branch of the Dockers' Union, and some E.T.U. branch minutes for the 1930s. Neither the City Library nor the University Library have much of direct relevance to the Labour movement, but both contain valuable collections of secondary sources on the history of individual local industries. Also in the City Library, there is a complete set of local daily and evening newspapers from the period, and from these the Western Daily Press, the Bristol Times and Mirror and the Bristol Evening Post have been used extensively. Indeed, where Labour movement records have been inadequate or non-existent, the local press has provided our

only source of information about many important events. It is unfortunate in this respect that no individual or organisation collected copies of the Bristol Labour Weekly, which has all but disappeared.

All trade union offices in the city have been contacted, and many have been visited. Again, the results were varied. Branch minutes of the A.S.E. No. 1 branch for the period 1898-1920 were found; the S.O.G.A.T. offices yielded two minute books of the N.U.P. & P.W. Bristol branch, but by far the most valuable records were located at the Kingswood offices of N.U.B.S.O. (now N.U.F.L.A.T.), for they have kept virtually complete records of the Bristol and Kingswood branches of that union from the 1890s until the present day. The Docks Group Office of the T.G.W.U. has kept copies of collective agreements relating to Dockworkers' wages and conditions. Other important trade union sources, such as T. & G.W.U. records, and the minutes of the A.S.E./A.E.U. District Committee seem sadly to have disappeared.

The records of the Borough Labour Party were destroyed with the Trades Council records in the wartime bombing. No records of the Bristol Central C.L.P. have survived, but we are fortunate that other records have been preserved. One volume of minutes of the General Council of the South C.L.P. were found at the party's offices. The North-East C.L.P. provided minutes of the old North C.L.P.'s General Council from 1925 to 1939, and its Joint Executive and Parliamentary Committee from 1928 to 1939. It also held the minutes of the Women's Central Committee from 1935 to 1939, and of the Hillfields Ward party from 1936 to 1939.

Mr. E. V. Rees, the one-time agent of Bristol West C.L.P. has kept the minutes of that party's G.C. from 1926 to 1939, and was very helpful in allowing me to consult them. The Bristol South-East C.L.P., largely

due to the assiduous hoarding of Mr. H. E. Rogers, has the best set of Labour party records in the city, relating to its predecessor, the Bristol East C.L.P. The offices in St. George contain several volumes of E.C. and G.C. minutes, a volume of St. George West Ward Labour Party minutes for 1921-22 and a volume of that Ward's Women's Section minutes for 1931-38. There are also several files containing constituency papers and correspondence, particularly between Mr. Rogers, the agent and secretary, and Sir Stafford Cripps, the M.P. after 1931. These were a most valuable source, and Mr. Rogers gave up many hours of his time to assist me.

Other local Labour movement organisations were approached. The Bristol Co-operative Society has kept the minutes of its Political Committee for 1921-39. I was fortunate that the I.L.P. archive is in Bristol being catalogued and that I was allowed by Mr. Don Bateman and Mr. Bruce Aubry, the archivist, limited access to that part of the archive which relates to the I.L.P. in Bristol. Thus not only were the (almost complete) minutes of the Bristol branch of the I.L.P. consulted, but also, several organisers' reports, and the publications of Walter Ayles were made available.

Local employers' organisations and individual firms were contacted in an attempt to supplement trade union records on industrial relations. The Bristol Chamber of Commerce and the Engineering Employers (West of England) Federation were very kind in allowing me access to their records. Most individual firms replied that they had no records of their dealings with the unions in the pre-war period, but J. S. Fry and Sons Ltd. allowed me to consult their copies of agreements with unions, and various papers, correspondence, and internal memoranda concerning their negotiations. Also at Frys I was helped by the

secretary of the T. & G.W.U. 3/90 branch, Mr. D. Brown, who allowed me to consult a minute book of the T. & G.W.U. Frys Works Committee for 1928-37.

A number of private individuals who have, or have had, a connection with the Labour movement were visited and provided much useful help. Mr. E. V. Rees, who has already been mentioned, allowed me to have microfilmed a bound volume of the Bristol Labour Weekly from September 1927 until August 1928. This film has been deposited in Bristol University Library. Councillor Mrs. Knight kindly allowed me to borrow the minutes of the Bristol Socialist Society for 1910 to 1912. Mr. A. Hitchings allowed me to photo-copy a number of issues of the Bristol Fighter, a Communist Party local General Strike bulletin, and Bread or Batons, a Communist Party pamphlet on the unemployed struggles of the 1930s. Where no documentary sources had been kept, various individuals helped by relating their memories of the period. Tape-recorded interviews with Mr. H. E. Rogers, Mr. W. Paxton and Mr. W. Coldrick have yielded much valuable information. These tapes have been transcribed and the texts will, at some future date, be deposited in Bristol University Library.

Outside Bristol, the Nuffield Library in Oxford, home of the Cripps papers, provided much useful material on the Bristol East C.L.P. in the 1930s. The T.U.C. Library was most helpful, and its collection of material on the General Strike was of particular value. The national offices of the T. & G.W.U., A.U.E.W., U.C.A.T.T., N.A.F.T.A., and the G.M.W.U. were visited and the published sources of those unions were made available. The L.S.E. Library yielded nothing of significance, nor did the Labour Research Department.

The work of research into the Bristol Labour movement has revealed that there is a grave danger of even more valuable historical material disappearing. Some documents, such as the E.T.U. minute books and some I.L.P. pamphlets, have been rescued from the basement of the Kingsley Hall, but much remains to be done to ensure that those records now known to be in existence are not allowed, through neglect or indifference, to be lost. It is to be hoped that the various institutions and individuals who hold this material will find some way of making permanent provision for its safe keeping.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.M.A.W.U.	Amalgamated Marine Workers' Union
A.S.C.J./A.S.W.	Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners/ Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers
A.S.E./A.E.U.	Amalgamated Society of Engineers/Amalgamated Engineering Union
A.S.L.E.F.	Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
A.S.R.S.	Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
A.U.B.T.W.	Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers
B.A.C.	Bristol Aeroplane Company
B.A.I.D.	Bristol Association for Industrial Reconstruction
B.C.S.	Bristol Co-operative Society
B.E.P.	Bristol Evening Post
B.L.P.	Borough Labour Party
B.L.W.	Bristol Labour Weekly
B.M.A.	Bristol Miners' Association
B.S.P.	British Socialist Party
B.S.S.	Bristol Socialist Society
B.T.M.	Bristol Times and Mirror
B.U.A.	Bristol Unemployed Association
C.L.P.	Constituency Labour Party
C.O.	Conscientious Objector
C.P. (G.B.)	Communist Party (of Great Britain)
D.R.	Dockers' Record
D.C.L.I. & G.W.U.	Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union
E.T.U.	Electrical Trades' Union
G.C.	General Council
G. & G.L.U.	Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union

List of Abbreviations used in text:-

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A.S.E./A.E.U.	Amalgamated Society of Engineers/Amalgamated Engineering Union
A.S.L.E.F.	Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
A.S.R.S.	Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
A.U.B.T.W.	Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers
B.A.C.	Bristol Aeroplane Company
B.A.I.R.	Bristol Association for Industrial Reconstruction
B.C.S.	Bristol Co-operative Society
B.E.P.	Bristol Evening Post
B.L.P.	Borough Labour Party
B.L.W.	Bristol Labour Weekly
B.M.A.	Bristol Miners' Association
B.S.P.	British Socialist Party
B.S.S.	Bristol Socialist Society
B.T.M.	Bristol Times and Mirror
B.U.A.	Bristol Unemployed Association
C.L.P.	Constituency Labour Party
C.O.	Conscientious Objector
C.P. (G.B.)	Communist Party (of Great Britain)
D.R.	Dockers' Record
D.W.R. & G.W.U.	Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union
E.T.U.	Electrical Trades' Union
G.C.	General Council
G. & G.L.U.	Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union

G.M.W.U.	General and Municipal Workers' Union
I.I.R.C.	Interim Industrial Reconstruction Committee
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party
J.A.C.	Joint Advisory Committee
J.I.C.	Joint Industrial Committee
L.E.A.	Labour Electoral Association
L.R.C.	Labour Representation Committee
M.F.G.B.	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
N.A.C.	National Administrative Committee
N.A.F.T.A.	National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association
N.A.U.L.	National Amalgamated Union of Labour
N-C.F.	No-Conscription Fellowship
N.C.L.C.	National Council of Labour Colleges
N.F.B.T.O.	National Federation of Building Trades Operatives
N.F.W.W.	National Federation of Women Workers
N.S.F.U.	National Sailors' and Firemens' Union
N.T.W.F.	National Transport Workers' Federation
N.U.B.S.O.	National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives
N.U.D.A.W.	National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
N.U.G.W.	National Union of General Workers
N.U.R.	National Union of Railwaymen
N.U.W.M.	National Unemployed Workers Movement
O.B.S.	Operative Bricklayers' Society
O.D.D.	Organising District Delegate
P.A.C.	Public Assistance Committee
P.L.C.	Port Labour Committee
P.L.P.	Parliamentary Labour Party
P.W.L.B.	Public Works Loan Board

S.D.F./S.D.P.	Social Democratic Federation/Party
S.L.	Socialist League
S.L.P.	Socialist Labour Party
S.S. & W.C.M.	Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement
T.C./T. & L.C.	Trades Council/Trades and Labour Council
T. & G.W.U.	Transport and General Workers' Union
T.U.C.	Trades Union Congress
U.B.L.	Union of Builders' Labourers
U.D.C.	Union of Democratic Control
U.P.W.	Union of Post Office Workers
W.D.P.	Western Daily Press
W.U.	Workers' Union

Precis

This thesis is a study of the developments of the Bristol Labour movement between the years 1910 and 1939. Chapter 1, the Introduction, defines the limits of the enquiry, attempts to pose the questions with which the thesis has been concerned, and seeks to locate the study within the specific social, economic, political and cultural background of Bristol. The industrial structure of the city, its social conditions, class relationships, and such factors as the influence of the Churches are analysed according to their influence on the development of the Labour movement in the quarter century before our period opens. It is argued that, as a result of a number of factors, Bristol's Labour movement was relatively weak, in terms of membership and support in 1910.

The summer of 1910 witnessed the beginnings of a reawakening of trade union militancy amongst Bristol dockers, which reached greater heights in the following year, and spread to other sections of transport workers and to miners. The theme of this chapter is that events occurred in spite of the union, and largely outside their control, often on the initiative of non-union workers. This was one reason why the response of the official leadership to the spontaneous assertions of trade union solidarity which occurred in 1911 was initially one of embarrassment rather than excitement. Politically, the movement gained very little from this awakening of class consciousness on the part of a large section of the local working class. The L.R.C. and the I.L.P. continued their slow progress at the polls, and in building up local electoral organisations, but there was no significant quickening of the pace. They were, it seems, unable to tap the mood

of militancy and assertiveness because their political outlook, being confined within parliamentary and municipal channels, did not connect with that mood.

In Chapter 3 the thesis breaks off from the narrative, briefly, in order to study developments in the trade union world which underpin, and also act as a counterpoint to the narrative. The extraordinary growth of the unions in the period 1910-20, is the theme of the first section. Of particular importance was the growth of the general unions, and especially in Bristol, the success of the Dockers' Union, under the leadership of Bevin. The effect of his experiences in Bristol on Bevin's ideas about the shape of the Transport and General Workers' Union, formed in 1921, provides an interesting subsidiary theme of this section.

The larger part of this chapter is concerned with trends in collective bargaining, particularly the growing practice of concluding bargains with employers which institutionalised conflict, and in which trade union officials accepted a responsibility for ensuring the good behaviour of their members. These trends are studied in the docks, mines, and boot and shoe industries. The institutionalisation of conflict, and the changing role of the trade union official, is seen to cut across the growing mood at rank and file level in some unions for a consolidation and concentration of trade union forces, and for greater unity in action. The Triple Alliance reflected this mood; but it also, in that it made compromises with the demand from trade union leaders to maintain their own freedom of action, reflected the contradiction between the day to day practice of these leaders, and the high ideals of the Alliance. The ambiguity of the position of trade union officials in regard to the conflict between their members' aspirations and assertiveness, and their own commitment to 'responsible'

trade unionism provides a theme which runs through this whole thesis. The outbreak of war and the declaration of an industrial truce did nothing to resolve this ambiguity. Chapter 4 highlights a number of trends which were accentuated by the special conditions of wartime, particularly the incorporation of trade union officials into state agencies for the management of industrial relations, and the willingness of many local officials, to a greater or lesser extent, to involve themselves in efforts to achieve a more lasting accommodation between unions and employers. This movement occurred at a time of growing radicalisation among large sections of the local working class, reflected in the growth of union membership, and of unofficial strikes, which was caused by inflation, food shortages and the tardiness of state intervention, and a growing weariness with the demands placed upon workers by the war effort. This process brought thousands of new members into the Labour movement for the first time. The war produced a new assertiveness and a political radicalisation which went far deeper than anything previously experienced.

Against this background, and in a relatively fluid political situation, the Labour movement undertook its own reconstruction, in preparation for the problems and opportunities of the peace. The 1918 Constitution of the Labour Party redefined the relationships between the different sectors of the movement. The trade union and political wings of the movement were now clearly separated, with no overlap allowed between political action, which was defined in parliamentary terms, and trade union action, which was to be strictly economic. The Parliamentary Labour Party and the trade union executives recognised each others' spheres of interest.

But the arrangement was an uneasy one at local level. The real link between the Trades Council, for example, and the L.R.C. could

not be signed away, and in 1920 a Trades and Labour Council was formed. Moreover, the actions of trades unionists had political implications which the Governments of the day refused to ignore, however much Labour politicians attempted to play them down. The result was that in the immediate post-war years it was the trades unions which held the centre of the stage in the drama of the working class's struggle for what was perceived, however vaguely or inarticulately, as social justice. The municipal and parliamentary struggles of the Labour party were of secondary importance, except in the years 1922-24. It was in these years that Bristol's first Labour MPs were elected.

A dominant theme of the years 1919 to 1926 was the working out of this conflict between the course set for the movement by the party constitution and programme of 1918, and the actual course of events which threatened to upset this tidy arrangement. It was a conflict that was not finally resolved until the defeat of the General Strike in 1926.

Other subsidiary themes in the very large Chapter 5 are the attempt of the I.L.P. to find itself a new role within the Labour movement after its original objectives had been achieved in 1918, and the struggles of the unemployed. The I.L.P. found sanctuary in a new role as guardian of the party's conscience, and as its propaganda and educational arm. The reaction of the official leadership of the movement to the unemployed pointed up the question of the relationship between this leadership and actual struggles in which workers were engaged, but which occurred outside their control, and took courses which the movement officially disavowed. In other words, it indicated the views of this leadership towards the class struggle. Recognising that such a struggle was a reality, they nevertheless shrank from

identifying themselves too closely with workers who were engaged in that struggle, for to do so would have undermined their claim to represent the wider national interest.

Nevertheless, since the largest body of support for the Labour party was among working class voters, it was impossible for Labour politicians to distance themselves entirely from workers engaged in struggle. This ambiguity could only be resolved, albeit ineffectively, by these leaders declaring their sympathy with the grievances of the particular group of workers involved but criticising their methods and their unofficial leadership. They declared, also, their willingness to help, but strictly on their own terms. On a number of occasions leading local Labour politicians, such as Aylee, attempted to defuse a potentially explosive situation. In this way they were acting in much the same way as union officials acted with regard to industrial conflict.

The period after the General Strike was one of defeat, demoralisation and depression. Chapter 6 again breaks off from the narrative to analyse the way in which the inter-war depression affected Bristol, and shows that local industry enjoyed mixed fortunes, and underwent major structural changes with the growth of the aircraft industry. Trade union membership slumped, and collective bargaining tended more and more towards accommodation between employers and unions, in a desperate effort by the unions to hang on wherever they could.

The political thrust of the movement was directed entirely into parliamentary channels, and with notable success. But the hopes of 1929 were dashed in the debacle of 1931, and the early 1930s were bleak years for the movement on all fronts. Yet the resilience of the Labour movement in the face of adversity was amply demonstrated, for the membership held up well, as did the total vote won at elections.

Moreover, internally these were important years for the Labour movement for it was in the 1930s, perhaps because of a siege mentality, the infra-structure of the local movement developed to an unprecedented extent, involving its activists at varying levels in its internal life. The middle 1930s witnessed a resurgence of the Labour Party at the polls, and in 1937 the Bristol Labour Party achieved a majority on the City Council for the first time.

Yet it must be said that the achievements of this first Labour council were negligible, for during the 1930s timidity and conservatism were the hallmarks of the Labour leadership, and this was buttressed by the domination of the party at both national conference and Borough Labour Party levels by the block votes of the trades unions. The use of block votes to impose a conservative policy were resented by large numbers of constituency activists who bore the brunt of the party's unspectacular electoral effort, yet had little chance to affect party policies. For them, the enormity of the problems demanded radical, not conservative solutions, and there was a significant following within the local movement, particularly in the Bristol East and West C.L.P.s, for the policies of Sir Stafford Cripps and the Socialist League.

The last chapter of this thesis is dominated by the working out of the conflict within the movement between left and right, with Cripps and Bevin, both national figures with strong local connections, at its heart. The United Front campaign, the Popular Front Campaign, Cripps' expulsion from the party, and the campaign to secure his reinstatement, seen against the backdrop of the rise of fascism abroad and the drift towards war, are the main themes of this chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

The Bristol Urban Cluster

The County Borough of Bristol contained a population of some 357,000 persons in 1911, at the outset of our period. During the latter part of the 19th century, in particular, the city had grown outwards from its original centre, spreading itself into the surrounding countryside, and swamping the neighbouring villages. As a result, the boundaries of the city were themselves extended on a number of occasions, most recently in 1897 and in 1904, when areas to the East, North and North-West were incorporated into the County Borough administration. The spread of population into the surrounding area continued, and further boundary extensions were necessary later, but by and large, because Bristol was surrounded by an agricultural area, and not by an industrialised region, with its associated urban sprawl, the boundaries of the area under review can be easily drawn.[1]

A difficulty arises, however, when studying the Labour movement of the area, in relation to the communities that were located around Bristol, particularly in South Gloucestershire, which were not incorporated within the County Borough, but were nevertheless linked economically to Bristol. These included Kingswood, Warmley, Mangotsfield, Filton and Patchway, of which Kingswood was the most important in 1911. It shared for example, industries such as boot and shoe manufacture and coal mining with Bristol, and trade unionists in these industries were linked organisationally to the main centre. Thus Kingswood miners were members of the Bristol Miners' Association. One of the three

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1. F. Hewitt, 'Population and Urban Growth in East Bristol', (Ph.D. Bristol 1965).

local N.U.B.S.O. branches - the others catered specifically for Bristol and Kingswood workers - linked members in the two centres. From a trades union point of view, it is necessary to consider Kingswood trades unionists as part of the wider Bristol Labour movement, and this point is underlined by the fact that Kingswood branches of N.U.B.S.O., for example, affiliated to the Bristol Trades Council.

Administratively, and politically however, Kingswood and the other communities in South Gloucestershire were separate entities. In local government Kingswood was administered by its Urban District Council; in parliamentary elections, the town was part of the Thornbury Division of Gloucestershire. The labour parties that grew up in these South Gloucestershire towns and in the Thornbury Division were not directly linked either with the Bristol L.R.C., or with its successor, the Borough Labour Party (B.L.P.); from the point of view of politics, the Kingswood Labour Party was not part of the Bristol Labour movement.

The Working Class

This thesis is concerned with the relationship between the 'working class' and the Labour movement. According to Marx the working class, in a society divided into bourgeoisie and proletariat, was the propertyless class, the exploited mass, which existed through the selling of labour power. Thus the working class is defined according to its relationship to the means of production. But this does not imply, nor did Marx intend that it should, that the working class could be defined in a mechanical way, as a 'structure' or a category. What was important to Marx was the concept of the working class as a political force, manifesting its presence upon the political scene through united action. In other words, consciousness on the part of workers that they belonged to 'the working class', and of the implication of this that they were willing and able to join, with

other members of that class, in united action in pursuit of common class aims, was an essential element in the Marxist definition of 'the working class'. E. P. Thompson has done valuable work in rescuing this truth from a generation of mechanistic sociologists and historians. The working class, he has written, is, above all, a relationship, 'a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness.'[1]

From this perspective, the development of a Labour movement was central to the definition of the political concept of the working class by workers themselves, for it was largely through the various agencies of that movement that their political presence made itself felt. Moreover, the growth of a Labour movement, and the consequent necessity for workers to clarify their attitude to it, was an essential component in the development of class consciousness among a widening section of the working class. The development of class consciousness and the growth of the Labour movement occurred as parallel trends within the same active process.

At this level of generality, such an analysis remains essentially valid. We must not assume, however, that the relationship between the Labour movement and its constituent base, the working class, was unilinear, nor that it was stable, nor lacking in ambiguity. As this thesis seeks to show, there were a number of areas, particularly with regard to workers who were actively involved in class struggle at any one time, where the relationship of these workers to the movement contained contradictions and ambiguities which belie all attempts to

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1. E. P. Thompson, The Growth of the English Working Class, (1968), p.9.

explain that relationship according to a simple formula. This was especially the case when the Labour movement was forced to strike an attitude to actions of workers which raised questions of class solidarity, or brought class issues to the fore. Class consciousness, although it found expression through the Labour movement, could frequently bring workers into conflict with the movement.

A word must be said in passing about the white-collar section of the working class. Objectively, by reference to their relationship to the means of production, the clerks, teachers and others were members of the working class. But because of the prevalence of middle class values among these workers, and their general resistance to trade union organisation, a study of their consciousness, and of their relationship to the Labour movement, and also of its relationship to them, raises special problems which are beyond the scope of this thesis. Accordingly, in this thesis we have concentrated our attention on the manual working class of Bristol.

In 1911, from figures obtained from the Census Report of that year, the working population of Bristol numbered some 104,456 males and 59,156 females.[1] A dominating feature of the male labour force was the large number of workers employed in building and general labouring, in transport, and in the food, drink and tobacco groups. A large body of workers were scattered over trades where there was a high degree of casual, unskilled labour. Thus there were 3009 males over ten who listed their occupation as 'general labour', some 3049 were employed in and around the docks, and another 2420 on the seas, rivers and canals. The building industry provided employment of various kinds and degrees of security for 8993 Bristol males. On the railways there were 3856 male workers, and on the roads, 6028.

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1. Census of England and Wales, 1911, Cd.7019, Vol.X.

Among the main factory trades, employment in the food, drink and tobacco industry predominated with some 12956 workers, although this figure related to all branches of the trade, including retailing. There were 2784 printers, 4472 workers in wood and furniture and 3648 in boots and shoes. In these industries, there tended to be a large female workforce, and in the tobacco, chocolate and paper factories female labour predominated, as was also the case in the solitary local cotton factory, and in the sizeable clothing industry. Thus the major employment for women was in the large factories, on the one hand, and in the small sweatshop-based industries on the other. But the female labour force also included 12,238 employed in domestic service and 2078 in laundries.

Finally, mention must be made in passing of the fact that, even in 1911, Bristol, as a commercial centre, provided employment for a large clerical workforce. Thus there were 5358 males classified as commercial clerks, and 4625 were employed by merchants, accountants and banks, whilst female clerks numbered 1534.

Bristol's Industrial Structure

Most observers of the Bristol industrial scene have taken as their starting point the extreme diversity of its trading and manufacturing interests. Thus A. J. Pugsley in 1922: 'The chief feature ... is the complexity of its industrial activities. Practically every phase of industry is represented to a greater or lesser extent in Bristol and no other city shows such a diversity of interest. Its economic life is not bound up with the prosperity of one or two trades, as is the case with most of our large towns.'[1]

It has often been said that this diversity gave the local economy a certain resilience, cushioning it from the effects of slumps in economic

1. A. J. Pugsley, 'The Economic Development of Bristol', in B.T.M., June-Aug. 1922.

activity, for it was rare that a commercial depression would touch all industries simultaneously and with equal ferocity. But another characteristic of equal importance was the interdependence of several local trades with one another. This integration operated at several different levels: there were industries linked through the reasons for their being located in Bristol, others through being aimed at the same markets, and others through modes of ownership.[1]

The heavy industry on which the industrial revolution was based was almost entirely absent from Bristol. Although there was a small local coalfield, Bristol was a long distance from the main coalfields, which provided power in the textile and metal industries. Thus Bristol experienced very slow growth during the early 19th century phase of industrial expansion. The Industrial Revolution did not really affect Bristol until the 1830's, and then only in a peripheral way. The building of the Great Western Railway, and of the steamships Great Western and Great Britain for the Atlantic trade followed by the building of the Great Western Cotton factory at Barton Hill, appeared to offer Bristol the chance of competing with Lancashire, but this burst of activity was not followed through, and in the mid 19th century the city stagnated. The Great Western Cotton factory, though large by Bristol standards, did not transform the local economy since it was unique.[2]

The cotton factory used local coal. The Bristol coalfield reached the peak of its activity in the period 1865-1885, and thereafter it steadily declined. In 1889 there had been 17 local pits at work, but by

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1. Examples of the first type were the processing and refining industries which relied on the port for their supply of imported raw materials. Those industries which were aimed at similar markets were the furniture, boot and shoe and clothing industries, whilst those which had similar modes of ownership were the chocolate, tobacco and paper and packaging industries.
2. A.J. Pugsley, op.cit.

1910 this number had shrunk to six, employing some 1800 miners.[1] Other local industries such as soap-making used Bristol coal, but the coal-field was not a major determinant of the location of industries in Bristol.

The fact that Bristol was not itself a centre of the staple export industries was reflected in the trade of the port. It was overwhelmingly an import port, with the export trade always occupying a minor place. Such exports as were shipped through Bristol and Avonmouth were chiefly galvanised iron, machinery, tinplates, chemical products and railway rolling stock, much of which was manufactured locally.[2] But it was the import trade which exercised the more important influence on the trading and industrial life of the city, for a wide range of processing industries sprang up around the port. The long colonial connections were still reflected in the trade. Grain was the most important single import, contributing directly and indirectly about two thirds of dock revenues; imports of grain through Bristol accounted for about 10% of total national imports in any one year.[3] Granaries and flour mills were erected on or near the wharves. Various seed-crushing mills, too, were set up for the processing of cotton seed and linseed. Away from the dock areas, other industries were also dependent on imported raw materials. There was a large import of timber, used in the furniture industry and in the building trade. Tobacco, chocolate and confectionery, and paper-making also drew part or all of their raw materials from the docks. Imported phosphates and ores were the basis of the local chemical and metal industries.

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1. Buchanan & N. Cossons, The Industrial Archaeology of the Bristol Region, pp.75, 87-88.
2. A. J. Pugsley, op.cit.
3. Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Annual Reports, 1910-1939, passim.

If we look at the markets aimed at by various local industries we find that this was a factor which affected the scale of operations, the degree of mechanization, and the degree of concentration. The boot and shoe, clothing, and furniture industries, although apparently very different, shared certain common features. They each served the local market, but the main thrust of their commercial endeavour was aimed at South Wales, and this had important consequences.[1] Cheapness of their products was essential if boot and clothing manufacturers were to be able to sell to South Wales miners. Hence they were attracted by the generally low wages of the Bristol area. It meant also that the quality of their goods was a secondary consideration; the shoddiness of the Kingswood miners' boots was frequently commented upon by union officials and manufacturers alike. It was among this group, too, that the most primitive forms of production technique were to be found. They were technically backward, and predominantly workshop-based industries. The N.A.F.T.A. organiser commented in 1923 that, in the furniture industry, 'Bristol is honeycombed with a large number of small shops.'[2] The boot trade, too, was small scale, and handworking was still prevalent in 1910. Moreover, a large body of outworkers which persisted into the 1930's - in 1929 there were said to be 350 outworkers still at work in the Kingswood district[3] - demonstrated the extreme technical backwardness of the boot trade in the area. The clothing industry, too, still included a substantial body of outworkers among its labour force, and the workshops were predominantly low-wage sweat-shops. These conditions were demonstrated by the Bristol Sweated Industries Exhibition in 1908, which concentrated its attention on the boot and shoe and clothing industries.[4]

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1. Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Annual Reports, 1911, 1912, refer to the depressed state of these trades in Bristol during miners' strikes in South Wales.
2. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Report, May 1923.
3. W.D.P., 21 February 1929.
4. Bristol Sweated Industries Exhibition, 1908.

The technical backwardness made it simple for new firms to gain entry to the industry. Bankruptcies among boot firms were common, but the amount of capital required, and the existence of the outworker system, allowed highly speculative companies to be launched. These three industries were highly competitive, and in manufacturers' circles the Bristol branches of the trades were regarded as unfair competitors, for they were low-wage centres, and often outside manufacturers' federations, and thus not bound by collective agreements with the unions. This was particularly true in the case of the boot and shoe industry. In the furniture trade several local firms were federated, but this was a trade with no national agreements, and the Manufacturers' Federation used the low wage centres such as Bristol to bolster their case for keeping down wages elsewhere.[1] In clothing, too, there were complaints from London tailors, for example, of unfair competition from Bristol.[2] These industries were thus chaotic in organisation, and backward in technique; they were also, because of this, and because of their dependence on the South Wales market, subject to violent fluctuations in demand for their products. Thus, during the industrial troubles of 1910-1912, all three reported periods of depression.

By contrast, those industries which looked to a wider national, and international, market had experienced considerable change in the scale and techniques of production, and in their form of ownership. Among firms in the tobacco, chocolate, paper and printing, and soap industries, the norm was a high degree of concentration, mass production methods, employing a highly developed division of labour and machine-based production, and a tendency towards monopolistic or oligopolistic forms of

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1. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Report, February 1916.
2. Clegg, Fox & Thompson, History of British Trade Unions since 1889, (Oxford, 1964), Vol.1, p.442.

control. The main commodity producers, Frys and Wills, produced branded goods, which were sold at a relatively low price, to an ever-increasing mass market. Robinsons and Mardons, in the paper and printing trades, followed along in the wake of these commodity producers in Bristol and elsewhere, expanding their production of packaging to meet the growing demands of the commodity producers. The main period of expansion had been in the late 19th century, but their fortunes were still improving in the opening years of the 20th century.

Frys' large factory in the Pithay had been opened in 1878, and by 1908 the firm employed 4600 workers in Bristol.[1] A large proportion of the workforce in these factories was unskilled and female. The East Street Bedminster factory of Wills was opened in 1886, and became the centre of the company's operations.[2] Other firms at this time outgrew their original premises. E.S. and A. Robinson and Company vastly expanded operations in Bristol from the mid 1880's, opening factories in Bedminster, Malago Vale and St. Phillips Marsh.[3] Mardon Son and Hall Limited moved to Temple Gate in 1894, and continued to expand its operations there.[4]

The development of the Wills Tobacco Company illustrates more general trends associated with this group.[5] From relatively modest beginnings as a manufacturer of hand-made cigarettes, cigars and smoking tobacco for the local market, the firm, through assiduous management, began to break into a national market from the 1870's with the early

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1. B. Little, History of Bristol, A Study in Atlantic Civilization, (Bristol 1954), p.260.
2. B. Alford, W.D. & H.O. Wills and the Development of the U.K. Tobacco Industry, 1760-1965, (1973), p.135.
3. B. Liveing, Bristol's Many Industries, (Bristol 1923).
4. H. Mardon, Landmarks in the History of a Bristol Firm, 1824-1904, (Bristol 1918).
5. B. Alford, op.cit., Ch. 6-10.

introduction of branded goods. An extensive marketing network, and the use of advertising, allowed it to establish a position as a leading manufacturer, and expansion of the firm's operations was clearly evident in the 1880's. The competitive advantage was consolidated at this time when Wills secured exclusive rights to important technical developments which made possible, for the first time, machine production of cigarettes. The introduction of the 'Woodbine' brand in 1888 at five cigarettes for a penny, marked the beginning of the modern tobacco industry, and Wills' leadership in this field enabled it to outstrip its rivals in the battle for markets and profits in the 1890's.

The 1890's were a period of intense competition, and potentially dangerous price-cutting. Moreover, in the late 1890's the intervention of the American Tobacco Company into the British market threatened the fortunes of all British tobacco manufacturers, and in 1901, as a defensive response to this threat, the leading British firms combined to form the Imperial Tobacco Company, within which Wills was a leading component. In the following year an arrangement was concluded with the American Tobacco Company, which eliminated price competition for the British market, and shared out the export market. Monopoly control had arrived, and the profitability of Wills was assured.

Branded goods, and technical innovation, were central to the expansion of other local industries, such as Frys. In the case of Christopher Thomas and Company, soap manufacturers, the picture was somewhat different. The company had been relatively prosperous in the 1880's, due to its technical mastery of the production of soap from glycerin, and its dominance of the local market.[1] Agreements with other local producers in other areas to reduce competition, based on

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1. C. Wilson, History of Unilever, (1954), Vol.1, p.14.

the production of a standard article, seemed to assure the company of continued success. But the introduction by Lever Brothers of their 'Sunlight' branded soap, made from vegetable oil, upset traditional arrangements, and forced Christopher Thomas and Company to make changes in order to compete.[1] The 'Puritan' soap brand was introduced in 1898, and an attempt was made to break into the London and other regional markets.[2] But in the early years of the new century, the company was in difficulties, through its inability to compete, and in 1912 was itself taken over by Lever Brothers.[3]

The printing and packaging firms followed in the wake of the commodity producers, especially after the introduction of branded goods, which placed new technical demands upon them. In the 1880's Mardon Son & Hall were the only cardboard box makers in Bristol, and won their first order from Wills in 1884.[4] Their expansion followed the success of Woodbines, but was made possible by the use of new German and American machinery for printing and carton-making. In 1902, in a move to protect their supplies of packaging, the Imperial Tobacco Company invited Mardons to join the amalgamation and this was accepted.[5]

E.S. and A. Robinson, founded in 1844, was also concerned in printing and paper-bag production. But rather than tie its fortunes closely to those of a single commodity producer, the company developed and expanded production independently. Its success in exploiting new techniques in printing, carton and paper-bag manufacture, in the late 19th century, enabled the company to establish itself as a leader of this branch of industry. Before 1914, however, there was little tendency

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1. Wilson, op.cit., p.20.
2. ibid., Vol.1, p.62.
3. ibid., Vol.1, p.122.
4. H. Mardon, op.cit.
5. ibid.

towards monopoly or oligopoly, although the scale of its operations were large, as was essential in an industry where mechanisation required heavy capital outlays.[1]

Mass production, large factories, and monopoly control introduced new elements into the local industrial structure. Hitherto the port had been the dominant influence on the local economy, bringing to Bristol a wide range of processing industries. The port was still a major factor, but large-scale commodity production was the growth point of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and other sectors of the economy became geared to its needs. Engineering firms, such as Strachan and Henshaw, Masson, Scott and Thrissell, and Brecknell, Munro and Rogers, involved themselves in the production of machinery for the tobacco, paper and printing industries.[2]

The building of large factories, employing upwards of 2000 workers, was also relatively new in Bristol, and a development that, for the Labour movement, was free of the problems associated with small scale workshop production. But there were other factors which cut across this trend. Firstly, although Wills, Frys, Robinsons and Mardons became part of vast national combines, a considerable degree of autonomy and specifically family control, remained in the branches. In particular, the old family traditions of paternalism towards their workforce, a characteristic of all four firms, was not lost with the national agglomerations. Indeed, in many cases, it was even more apparent at this period than before, if somewhat altered in its style of operation.

After 1880 it was no longer required of a clerk employed by Wills that he be a member of a Sunday School, but the twin policies of strict

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1. B. Darwin, Robinson's of Bristol 1844-1944, (Bristol 1945).
2. Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Monthly Journal, May 1937, May 1938.

moral discipline and paternalistic kindness remained as central features of the company's labour relations.[1] Welfare benefits were extended. A permanent matron was engaged in 1889 and a company doctor introduced in 1895. In the same year a Sick Club was started. The new Bedminster factory of 1886 incorporated a dining room and kitchens, where subsidised meals could be obtained. Thrift was encouraged through the company's own Savings Bank. A number of amenities were provided, which included subsidised cricket and football clubs, a brass band, a lending library, and evening classes. But more important were the wages earned by Wills employees, which, especially for unskilled and female workers, were high by the standards of the time. In 1889, unskilled males of 20 years age earned 18s per week, rising to 25s per week at age 30.[2] This was supplemented by an annual profit-sharing bonus, which encouraged employees to identify with the fortunes of the firm. The Wills family were staunch Congregationalists, whose missionary zeal spilled over into their relationships with their workforce; much of their welfare work was designed to encourage the virtues of thrift, sobriety, diligence, and Christian morality, which they themselves held to be so important. They could easily afford such generosity, for in tobacco manufacture, which was subject to such high duties, wages formed a small proportion of total costs, so that quite substantial increases in wages were possible without having any noticeable effect on profits.[3]

Other firms offered similar welfare benefits. In 1889 Robinsons granted a week's holiday with pay after 12 months' service.[4] Later, a pension fund and profit-sharing scheme were inaugurated. Mardons and Frys were active in this field. These efforts, by the largest employers

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1. B. Alford, op.cit., Ch.12.
2. ibid., p.285.
3. ibid., p.292.
4. B. Darwin, op.cit.

in the city, tended to encourage the growth of attitudes of loyalty to the company amongst a large part of their workforce, and it is significant that much of the welfare provisions were introduced in 1889, or afterwards. At least part of the explanation for their introduction would seem to be that they were a response to the growing evidence of working class unrest and militancy, which did not entirely pass them by. Frys' workers, for example, were involved in the strikes of 1889. It was, perhaps, no accident, that trade unionism remained weak amongst workers in these firms until World War I.

Social Conditions

In 1910 there was ample evidence of poverty in Bristol. But some sections of the working class were relatively prosperous. Among skilled engineers and printing workers, wage rates were high. In 1914, W. Ayles wrote a survey of wage rates for a pamphlet, Facts of Bristol's social life, in which he gave examples of local wage rates.[1] In engineering, patternmakers could earn 40/3d per week in the City, and 45s. in Avonmouth. These were among the top rates paid for manual work. In the building industry, hourly rates for skilled craftsmen tended to be low, at 9d to 9½d an hour, and building workers were subject to the vicissitudes of weather, which caused weekly earnings to suffer.[2] Ayles estimated that builders' labourers in December, when weather was normally at its worst, would normally only earn about 15s. per week. Dockers also suffered the same problem, although in their case this was due to the casual system. In

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1. Bristol Social Service Committee, Facts of Bristol's Social Life, (Bristol 1914), pp.11-12. For Ayles, see Biographical Appendix, p.395.
2. In 1906, the hourly rate for building craftsmen of 9d per hour, and for labourers of 6d per hour, compared unfavourably with the rates paid in London - 10d per hour and 7d per hour respectively. There was thus little advance in building workers' wages in the years between 1906 and 1913.
   E. H. Hunt, Regional Wage Variations in Britain 1850-1914, (Oxford, 1973).

the boot and shoe industry the most highly paid male workers, the clickers, earned less. But in the boot and shoe industry, and in the clothing trades, the system of outworking and sweatshops meant that there were large numbers of workers, mainly women, who were paid at viciously exploitative rates. The average outworker in the boot trade was estimated in 1908 to earn, on a 10 hour day, between 9s. and 13s. per week. In the manufacture of blouses and underlinen, women were earning about 8s. per week on a 9 hour day. But these earnings were even further reduced by the deductions for materials and for the hire of machinery.

As for the miners, no direct evidence relating to their wages is available, but in general their rates were closely tied to those operating in the Somerset coalfield which, as Hunt has shown, were the lowest in the country.[1]

There was clearly severe poverty among many of those who were in work. The situation was much worse among the unemployed, and under-employed. A number of traditional Bristol industries were in decline in the early 20th century, such as the mining industry, pottery, and sugar refining. In others, such as the docks, there was normally a surplus of workers competing for the available work. The existence of a substantial section of the working population who lived in or near poverty was reflected in a number of ways. It was estimated that in 1880, some 4% of the population of Bristol were paupers,[2] a relatively high figure for an industrial city. Part of the explanation was to be found in the tradition in Bristol of giving charity which, it was claimed, attracted paupers from elsewhere. Private charity was a much

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1. E. Hunt, op.cit.
2. e.g., Manchester's population contained 3.3% paupers, Liverpool's, 3.9%, and Leeds 2.7% in 1880; see, B. J. Atkinson, 'The Bristol Labour Movement, 1868-1906', Oxford, D. Phil. (1970), p.40.

less important source of relief in 1910, as state and municipal provisions had gradually been extended. On 1st April 1910 there were 2944 inmates of workhouses and children's homes in Bristol, an increase over the 1904 figure of 2513. In 1914 there were 2566 inmates. Of the outdoor poor, however, there had been a reduction over the 10 year period. Some 6030 persons had been in receipt of outdoor relief in 1904; in 1910 there were 5764 persons, and in 1914 the number had been reduced to 3872.[1] During the year 1913 it was found, during the medical inspections of school children, that 7.88% of children were undernourished, and that a further 55% of children had a diet that was distinctly bad. In that year, some 370,627 school meals were provided by the Education Committee for necessitous children.[2]

Bristol was not a healthy city, but neither was it as unhealthy as some of the northern industrial towns. In the working class districts of the town inadequate housing and overcrowding took their toll in disease. The areas of St. Phillips and Bristol Central were the most densely populated areas of the city. W. Ayles commented in 1912: 'One of the first ideas that would strike a stranger coming into the centre of Bristol would be the number of poor streets it contained near the centre. In whatever direction he walked, into the Temple, the Dings, St. Augustine, St. Jude's, St. Matthias, or St. Phillips, there he would find dingy houses, narrow courts, and a mixture of all kinds of bad air.'[3] In Bristol Central there was a population density of 45.8 persons per acre, and in St. Phillips, 67.4. St. George was also relatively overcrowded, with a density of 38.7, whereas Westbury and Stapleton were well favoured with densities of 2.1 and 10.7 respectively.[4]

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1. Facts of Bristol's Social Life, p.3.
2. Facts of Bristol's Social Life, pp.8-10.
3. W. Ayles, Bristol's Next Step, (Bristol 1912), p.7.
4. Facts of Bristol's Social Life, p.1.

Disease took a heavy toll of lives in the working class districts. Infantile mortality was highest in St. Phillips, where it stood in 1911 at 100.4 per thousand, and in Bristol Central, where it was 105.6. Bedminster was also unhealthy, with an infantile mortality rate of 88.1, and Clifton, too, which contained some slum areas, had a rate of 99.1. Westbury's rate was lowest, at 69.6.[1] Infectious diseases and tuberculosis, which were associated with poverty and slum housing, were especially rife in Bristol Central and St. Phillips. Among the most prevalent diseases were diphtheria and scarlet fever, and tuberculosis. Between December 30th 1912 and 3rd January 1914 there were 475 cases of tuberculosis in Bristol, of which but seven were in Westbury, compared with 96 in St. Phillips, 72 in Bristol Central, and 89 in Bedminster. It was commented in Facts of Bristol's Social Life that, 'Badly ventilated, over-crowded bedrooms, full of pre-respired air, and the fact that such rooms, and even frequently the same bed, are shared with a consumptive patient by other members of his family, are probably responsible for more tuberculosis than any other one factor'.[2]

Religion and Society

In 1882 a religious census organised by the W.D.P., revealed that in comparison with the inhabitants of other large cities, Bristolians were unusually religious. Some 52.9% of the population attended church on one particular Sunday, and Atkinson has concluded that 'such large attendance at religious services could not have been attained without a higher degree of working class participation than in comparable English

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1. It should be noted, however, that these figures compared favourably with the national average infantile mortality rate of 130 per 1000 in 1911. (B. R. Mitchell & P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics, (Cambridge 1971).
2. Facts of Bristol's Social Life, p.2.

cities.'[1] But a recent study has shown that, in terms of attendances, the influence of churches and chapels was ebbing by the turn of the century, and they exercised a much reduced sway over the lives of Bristolians by 1914. Pollard, in his study, Labour in Sheffield, has noted the same trend in that city at this time, and it was undoubtedly a general trend among the urban working class in the period before the outbreak of war.[2] Between the Bristol churches there was a near parity of influence of the Anglicans and Non-conformists. Some churches were predominantly middle class in the composition of their congregations, such as the Wesleyan Methodists and the Congregationalists, whilst others, such as the Free and Primitive Methodists, were stronger in working class areas, particularly Bedminster and Kingswood, and the mining areas of East Bristol. There was a strong free church predominance in East Bristol, and this was reflected in the radicalism of local politics.[3]

It was against the background of decline that the churches attempted to involve themselves more in the social and cultural life of the community which they sought to serve. Ancillary organisations, such as Brotherhoods, bible classes and adult schools were established, particularly in the period 1890 to 1900, and to a lesser extent in the following decade.[4] There were also temperance entertainments, organised to provide an alternative to drink. After the missions, the Adult Schools became the second largest socio-religious institutions which were offering recreational facilities to the working class. Originally founded by the Quakers in the 1850's, the most important phase of their

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1. B. Atkinson, op.cit., p.2.
2. S. Pollard, A History of Labour in Sheffield, (Liverpool 1959), p.196.
3. D. Carter, 'The Social and Political influence of the Bristol Churches, 1830-1914', (Bristol M.Litt. 1972).
4. ibid., pp.211-214.

development was in the years 1890 to 1910,[1] and by 1908 there were fifty Adult Schools in Bristol, with 5000 students, which provided moral and religious instruction blended with amusement. In their educational work, the emphasis was placed less on the church and more on the concept of 'Catering for the whole man'. Also important were the Brotherhoods, which grew up mainly in the decade before 1914, and which provided much the same facilities as the Adult Schools, although tending more towards a Methodist influence rather than Quaker. They also tended to place greater emphasis, in their educational endeavour, on the discussion of pressing social problems.[2] Their name, as Carter has observed, indicated a desire to harness working class concepts of brotherhood and solidarity to religion.[3] The relative success of these institutions in attracting large working class congregations to their activities testifies to the continuing strength of religion among at least a large section of the Bristol working population.

The involvement of leading local employers in mission work and in the Adult School and Brotherhood movements exercised an important influence over working class attitudes towards these employers, and, by extension, towards the employing class and the economic system in general. Prominent among the employers who were involved in socio-religious work were the Frys and Wills families, of whom the former were Quakers, whilst the Wills family were Congregationalists, and the Robinsons Baptists. These activities were an extension into the wider community of the paternalistic policies they pursued towards the workers in their own

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1. H. Meller, 'Organised Provisions for Cultural Activities, and their Impact on the Community, 1870-1910: with special reference to Bristol', (Ph.D. Bristol 1968), pp.388-410.
2. D. Carter, op.cit.
3. ibid.

factories, and were motivated by the same concept of 'concern for the whole man', as well as a desire to foster within the working class certain essentially middle class values.[1] The connection between the policies of these employers and the existence locally of a definite stratum of 'respectable poor' within the working class has been noted by Meller. Pollard's study of Sheffield also drew attention to the growth of respectability within the working class of that city, although he tended to locate these attitudes within the rather privileged stratum of the labour aristocracy.[2] In Bristol there seems to have been a much wider stratum of respectable working men which cannot be equated solely with the labour aristocracy, for it included a large part of the workers employed in the larger factories of the city, whether they were skilled or not.

Firms such as Frys and Wills, as we have seen, had become, or were in the process of becoming, swallowed up within larger national agglomerations. But within the monopolies a considerable degree of local autonomy remained, at least in their formative years; in particular, the family traditions of paternalistic attitudes towards the workforce were not lost. The welfare facilities available to these workers, the wide range of benefits offered by their employer for long and loyal service, their relatively high wages, even for unskilled work, and the relative security of their employment tended to temper their attitudes towards their employers, and to foster attitudes of accommodation with the economic and political system. Despite the fact that they were engaged in mass production industries and concentrated in large factories, these workers resisted trades union organisation until comparatively late. There was a tendency for them to seek individual advancement through the

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1. H. Meller, op.cit.
2. S. Pollard, op.cit.

promotion opportunities offered by the firm as a reward for loyal service, and individual betterment through the social and educational facilities provided with the help of the employers and the local middle class, rather than through the collective provisions of the Labour movement.

Other workers fell within this stratum. The attributes of discipline, loyalty to the company, long service, sobriety and clean living were shared, for example, by large numbers of railway workers whose employers insisted on an almost military style of behaviour. Other local employers, such as the Douglas family, the Robinsons and Mardons, were interested in welfare work. And the attributes of sobriety, together with the benefits of education, extended to the wide layers of workers who attended the Adult Schools and the Brotherhoods. The net effect of this activity on the part of a section of the local employing and middle classes was to induce within that stratum of workers who came within their orbit a desire for respectability, an accommodatory attitude towards the social and economic system, and political views which tended towards radical Liberalism rather than towards socialism. It is, of course, debatable whether an employer's expectations of, and demands on, his workers could govern their lives beyond the working environment, but the system of rewards and punishments operated by many employers cannot have been without influence on behaviour.

The 'labour aristocracy' formed part of the wider stratum of respectable working men, yet were themselves a very select body of men, marked off from the rest by their possession of superior and relatively rare skills. Their skills underpinned their whole standing in society, for it was this that brought them not only enhanced wages, relative security, and status, but also a certain independence from individual employers. In general, they were not at all hostile to trades unionism, for it was their special brand of unionism, with its emphasis on

restricting the supply of skilled labour, and the provision of extensive benefits as a corollary of this policy, which was both an expression of, and a means of, protecting their independence from the whims and fortunes of individual employers. But their collectivism was of a highly sectional nature, for they sought to distance themselves from the main body of the working class and gain recognition of their status in the eyes of the employing class. The labour aristocrats' characteristic desire for respectability thus pointed up the paradox of their situation, for while they were able, to some extent, to assert their independence of individual employers, at the same time their trade unionism was based on a de facto acceptance of the permanence of the capitalist system, and on a desire to conform to the dominant cultural and social values of that system, which were those of the employing class. They were traditionally the main sources of support for Liberal politics within the working class.[1]

Atkinson has expressed some doubts as to the validity of the concept of the Labour aristocracy when applied to Bristol[2] in the late 19th century. As evidence for this he has pointed to the fact that within the building industry, the boundaries of the labour aristocracy were not as precise on the lower side of their territory as has traditionally been supposed. Between the labourers and the aristocrats, he argues, there were workers who belonged to neither group, but shaded into both. Moreover, it is impossible to identify the craft societies in the building industry entirely with the labour aristocracy. The building industry, however, provides too narrow a basis of evidence for it to be possible to cast doubt on the whole concept of the labour aristocracy. Moreover,

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1. Hobsbawn, cf. Labouring Men, is a major proponent of the theory of the Labour aristocracy.
2. B.J. Atkinson, op.cit., pp.154-156.

within that industry there were certain features which made it untypical. Firstly, the violent seasonal and cyclical fluctuations in employment which afflicted the industry rendered the position of even the skilled workmen less secure than the skilled workers in other industries. Whilst the wages of skilled building workers were above those paid to the labourers in the industry, there was a certain mutual respect, particularly between bricklayers and their labourers, and this was reflected in the joining together of these two groups, in 1914, in a common struggle for higher wages. Carpenters and other skilled building workers conducted their own separate struggles at the same time, but the unity of bricklayers and labourers held fast until the conclusion of the strike.[1]

Thus the building industry in Bristol provides some evidence that the Labour aristocracy was by no means as well defined as a group as has sometimes been supposed. But other industries, such as printing and engineering, where skilled men formed an important part of the workforce, provided evidence which tends to confirm the more traditional view. The profusion of unions among the skilled trades in these industries was a reflection of the deep commitment to upholding the status and privileges of each group of skilled workers. A look at the minutes of the A.S.E. Bristol No. 1 Branch for the period after 1898 shows not only the members' almost exclusive concern for the problems of skilled engineers, but also their determination to uphold, through the disciplinary powers exercised by the branch, their respectability.[2] Slackness at work was frowned upon in the branch, and drunkenness and moral turpitude were severely censured. The engineers, at least, were in no doubt as to their very special status

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1. See below, pp.126-7.
2. A.S.E., Bristol No. 1 branch, Mins, 1898-1920.

among working men, and used their union to protect that status in a characteristically Labour-aristocratic fashion.

Just as there was a stratum of respectable poor, so too there were the non-respectable poor. Among this group were to be found the casual workers, the general labourers, the unskilled; those who were chronically under-employed, and those who were unemployed and forced to apply to the Guardians for relief; the slum dwellers and the criminal elements. All were lumped together in the minds of the middle and upper classes. But the lines of division between the various strata were not clearly drawn. Dockers and carters would be located in the non-respectable poor, because of the casual nature of their trade, and the belief that their trade was unskilled. Yet the Dockers' Union of Tillett took on many of the characteristics of the craft societies, particularly in its attempts to raise the status and dignity of dock-workers, and dispel the assumption that their work was unskilled. The Union rule book, for example, prohibited the holding of branch meetings in public houses. In its concessions to the temperance movement, the union leadership at least indicated its affinity with the respectable poor. Bevin, indeed, obtained much of his early education through the Adult Schools, as did many other union officials of his time.[1] This is a testimony to the strength of the socialising influence of these institutions in Bristol.

A word must be said in passing about the local employer class. As with the working class, there were wide variations within the employer class in wealth, and attitudes, and superficially at least these may obscure the underlying unity of interests, both vis-a-vis their employees, and in relation to the aristocracy. But a striking feature of the local employer class was its assertively bourgeois character, and this was equally true of the successful families like the Wills, as it was of the

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1. A. Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, (1960), vol.1, p.10.

less prosperous members. Alford has written this of the Wills family, highlighting their bourgeois character:

'They were guided by a strong belief in the parable of the talents, though this did not lead them to adopt a completely austere, puritanical view of life. Congregationalism taught them a sense of responsibility to those less fortunate than themselves, and their religious non-conformity was the mainspring of their political radicalism: though as the character of English radicalism changed over the nineteenth century, they gradually came to appear less radical and more paternal. Moreover, towards the end of the century certain members of the family became Anglicans but this had little effect on their general outlook on life.'[1]

Generally the Wills family resisted the embraces of the aristocracy, whom they matched in wealth. An exception to this rule was Sir Frederick Wills, who was made a baronet in 1897, and entered Parliament in 1900 as a Unionist member for Bristol North, thus breaking the family's Liberal tradition.[2] Much closer to the family's traditions was William Henry Wills, (1830-1911) who entered Parliament in 1895 as Liberal member for Bristol East, although he too was granted the title of Lord Winterstoke in 1906.[3]

None of the Wills family was a local M.P. in 1910. But they retained considerable local political influence, within both major parties. Sir W. H. Wills in a letter to the Chairman of British American Tobacco in 1904 showed that he was acutely aware of the political importance of his relationship with his workers. He wrote: 'My personal character and influence in Bristol, my seat in Parliament, indirectly owe much to my character as an employer of labour, and the same applies

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1. B. Alford, op.cit., p.279.
2. ibid., p.281.
3. ibid., p.327.

to Sir Frederick Wills.'[1] Much the same thing was equally true of the large number of local employers who were also political figures in the city.

The Labour Movement before 1910

In a city which contained such a wide range of industries, and thus a variety of different unions, and also whose working population was itself stratified, it is at least questionable whether it is possible to talk in terms of a Labour movement. The problem is further complicated by the split between the trade union and socialist wings of the 'movement'. The socialist movement itself was divided into various factions. Samuel Bale, a member of the Bristol Socialist Society, when writing a historical sketch of the movement in Bristol, entitled his work, A History of the Labour and Socialist Movements in Bristol.[2] The question of what actually constitutes a 'Labour Movement', and whether such a thing existed in the Bristol of 1910 is crucial to the whole study of later developments.

The basic units of organisation were the trades unions. In 1910 trades unionists were in very much of a minority among the working population as a whole in the city, although in certain industries, organisation was relatively strong. It was very weak among the factory workers of the city, particularly in those industries such as tobacco, confectionery and cotton which employed large numbers of women workers. The paper and printing works were on the whole better organised, but again the women were a source of weakness. In the clothing, furniture and boot and shoe industries there was some organisation, particularly among the more skilled workers, but the small workshops and outworkers of the city were notoriously difficult to organise. Among railwaymen,

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1. B. Alford, op.cit., p.378.
2. Samson Bryher (pseud.), A History of the Labour and Socialist Movements in Bristol, (Bristol 1931).

the footplate staff were well unionised, and there was organisation too among the traffic grades and the clerical staff.[1] The miners possessed more cohesion than most groups of workers, but even here there were some 40% of the workforce who were outside the Bristol Miners' Association in 1911.[2]

Among the craftsmen, of course there were substantial cores of organisation. Yet even in the engineering industry, there were large numbers of non-unionists employed on skilled jobs, and there were some factories where the employer still successfully resisted trades union encroachments. The 100% unionised shop was a rarity, although most employers could be induced to pay the union district rate. In the building trade, the A.S.C.J., the O.B.S., and the O.S.M. all had considerable memberships.

The general unions were but a shadow of their former selves in 1910. The Gasworkers' Union and Tillett's Dockers' Union had been thrust into prominence by the militant upsurge of 1889, when previously unorganised, unskilled, and frequently female, workers had flooded into these 'new' unions, and taken up the struggle for better pay and conditions and union recognition. Tillett's Dockers had organised the Bristol dock workers after their success in London, and won some advances. The Gasworkers' though based originally on the gas industry, spread into several factory and other trades in Bristol. Cotton, tobacco, confectionery, clothing, metal, and many other workers were drawn briefly into the struggle. But after the initial successes of 1889 the new unions faced a counter-offensive from the employers, culminating in the Black Friday incident in 1892 when striking deal runners and female confectionery workers clashed with police who tried to break up their march. During the 1890's membership of the new unions fell as rapidly as it had formerly grown,

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1. This survey is based on various journals and minutes of individual unions. See Note on Sources.
2. W.D.P., 19 August 1911.

and for most of the period from the mid-1890's until 1910 the Gasworkers' and Dockers' relied on small groups of workers to retain some hold in Bristol. The Dockers' were left only with corn porters, whilst the Gasworkers' had a wider base in the gasworks, the Corporation manual workers, and builders' labourers. Thus these two unions, although ostensibly general societies, were forced back into the position of being little more than sectional societies, representing the interests of particular groups.[1]

Trades unions, by their very nature, represent primarily sectional interests. But in a number of ways many trade unionists demonstrated their affinity with a wider movement of organised labour, and this was a growing trend towards the end of the 19th century. The Bristol Trades Council had been formed in 1873, and in its early years it was dominated by the craft societies, particularly the building trades unions.[2] It represented an expression by those bodies which affiliated to it out of sympathy and solidarity with their fellow trade unionists, both in Bristol and elsewhere. The events of 1889 transformed the trades union situation in Bristol, and reacted upon the Trades Council. The number of organisations affiliated rose, and the new affiliates brought with them a large body of new trade unionists. Moreover, the Council took a leading role, along with local socialists, in co-ordinating the many and varied struggles that were taking place, and a Strike Organisation Committee was established to perform this role.[3] By 1896 the Council had become almost completely representative of trades unionism in the city, with no major society remaining unaffiliated. But, by this time, the decline of the general unions was reflected in the balance of forces

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1. B. J. Atkinson, op.cit., Ch. VI.
   P. Leng, 'The Dockers' Union in Bristol and South Wales 1889-1921', M.A. Kent 1973.
2. B. J. Atkinson, op.cit., pp.188-196.
   S. Bryher, op.cit., Part I, p.13.
3. S. Bryher, op.cit., Part II, pp.15-21.

within the Council, for between the mid-1890's and 1910, it was the old craft societies, and particularly the A.S.C.J., which reasserted their leadership in the Council.[1]

Neither the unions individually, nor collectively through the Trades Council, represented more than a minority of the local manual working population in 1910. Among those workers who were members of unions, a wider class consciousness was undoubtedly a growing force, and this was expressed not only through the Trades Council, but also through their growing support for independent Labour representation. But in the unions there was very little evidence of a commitment to the extension of trade union membership. H. A. Turner has sought to explain the 'gap' in trades union development between the ambitious attempts at general unionism in the 1830's and the upsurge of 1889 in terms of the restrictionist and exclusionist policies operated by the skilled craft unions of the mid-19th century.[2] There is considerable force in this argument. In a sense, this factor reasserted itself after the upsurge of militancy and, in this later phase, the new unions were themselves part of the problem. Only they, being based on the unskilled, general labourers, could seek to embrace the wide sections of the class that were non-unionised, and thus bring them within the orbit of the Labour movement. Only they could embrace genuinely class-wide ambitions, and it was no accident that the leadership of these new unions was socialist.[3] But even in 1889 the Dockers' Union, for example, addressed itself exclusively to the problems faced by dock workers. During the period of retreat, these unions fell back into the position of sectional societies, seeking to

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1. B. J. Atkinson, op.cit., pp.287-290.
2. H. A. Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy, (Cambridge 1962), Ch. IV.
3. B. Tillett, W. Thorne and T. Mann were members of the S.D.F.

hang on to their bases of membership, and ceased to attempt to organise more widely. A major factor here was, of course, employers' opposition to trade unionism and the inability of large groups of workers to sustain union organisation in the face of this. But it was equally true that the 'defensive siege' mentality into which the officials of the general unions in particular slipped contributed to the problem. In 1901 the Gasworkers attempted to organise the tramwaymen in Bristol, but were defeated, and this added to the caution shown by union officials in the next decade.[1]

Much of the crusading zeal of the movement in the period prior to 1910 was directed towards political action. The process of detachment of the loyalties of trade unionists, and working men in general, from the Liberals had been a long one, and was by no means complete even by 1910. In the 1870's the Trades Council had been nominally independent of the political parties, but its leadership had been overwhelmingly Liberal. In the mid-1880's, however, the relationship of working men with the Liberals had begun to be questioned. In part, this reflected the growing class differences within Bristol society, as industry became larger in scale. It was also associated with the rebirth of socialist ideas. A branch of Hyndman's S.D.F. was formed in Bristol in 1884, and began to engage in socialist propaganda.[2] The upsurge of militancy in 1889, and the leadership in the struggles of socialists, provided the socialists with a wider audience for their ideas than had hitherto been available. The idea of independent Labour representation gradually gained credibility. In 1885 the Labour League had been formed on the initiative of the Trades Council, and had scored some early successes when it won a seat

1. B. J. Atkinson, op.cit., pp.279-283.
2. S. Bryher, op.cit., Part I, p.18.

on the School Board in 1886, and a council seat, in St. Pauls, in the following year.[1] But the League had but a short life, and in 1891 was replaced by the Trades Council Labour Electoral Association.[2] In these early years, disunity between the trade union sponsored bodies and the socialists weakened the Labour forces. The Labour League's, and the L.E.A.'s programmes, were radical rather than socialist, and socialists preferred to act outside them. In 1892, in the School Board elections, L.E.A. and Socialist candidates competed with one another. Black Friday in 1892, however, seriously embarrassed the Liberals on the Council and strengthened the hand of those who argued that trade unionists needed independent representation.[3] In 1893 two L.E.A. candidates were elected to the Board of Guardians, and two socialists were elected to the Council. Encouraged by this success a Labour candidate was put up with I.L.P. support, in a by-election in Bristol East in 1895. He made very little impact on the campaign, and Labour came face to face with its own weakness in the parliamentary arena.[4]

The problem of independence from the Liberals was not solved by the formation of the L.E.A. Although the L.E.A.'s programme was more socialistic than that of the Labour League, it still stopped short of a full socialist programme. This was partly because of continuing dependence on the Liberals. The two council seats won in 1893 had deliberately been uncontested by the Liberals. Between 1895 and 1906 the Labour representation was increased from three to five but all Labour's

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1. S. Bryher, op.cit., Part I, p.33.
2. B. J. Atkinson, op.cit., p.330.
3. S. Bryher, op.cit., Part II, pp.38-45. The name 'Black Friday' referred to an incident on 23rd December 1892, when a march of striking female confectionery workers and locked-out dockers was attacked by police and cavalry.
4. ibid., Part II, p.57.

gains depended on Liberal support. When the L.E.A. attempted to break free of the Liberal entanglement, as it did in 1904, and contest seats held by Liberals, its performance was depressing. Moreover, this always raised the danger of letting in the Conservatives by splitting the radical vote.[1]

In the L.E.A. the unions had taken the leading role. But signs of a more independent approach to politics were beginning to manifest themselves in the first decade of the century. An I.L.P. branch was re-established in the City in 1902.[2] The formation of the national L.R.C. in 1900 encouraged the parliamentary ambitions of the Trades Council which affiliated in 1903.[3] Negotiations between the Council and the I.L.P. and B.S.S. were begun on the setting up of a local L.R.C. More encouragement came from the municipal election results after 1906. In that year, seats were gained in St. George East and West wards, and a further seat in the West ward was gained in 1907. In 1908, an Easton seat was captured.[4] The Bristol L.R.C. was set up in 1908, to which the Trades Council, the unions, and the I.L.P. were all affiliated, but the B.S.S. refused to join in because of the Lib-Lab programme adopted by the Committee.[5] Thus, even at this stage, the problem of the Liberals was not solved, except in organisational terms. The programme of the L.R.C. pandered to the Lib-Lab leanings of large numbers of trade unionists. And, although the L.R.C. was established to assert the electoral independence of Labour, its performance at elections over the next few years was depressing. In 1909 it lost a seat in St. George West, and in the following year suffered a further loss there, and another in Easton. Nor were its parliamentary ambitions any more successful. In January

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1. B. J. Atkinson, op.cit., p.370.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
4. S. Bryher, op.cit., Part III, p.1.
5. B. J. Atkinson, op.cit., p.385.

1910 F. Sheppard was put up as a Labour candidate with both L.R.C. and B.S.S. support, in Bristol East, but could manage no more than third place.[1]

We can safely conclude that a Labour movement existed in Bristol by 1910. A variety of trade union and political organisations had been thrown up to express working class demands. An L.R.C. had been created which linked trade unionists and the I.L.P. in a common endeavour to secure independent Labour representation, and, although the B.S.S. had stayed outside, because the wider Labour movement was not yet willing to commit itself to socialist aims, the two were regarded as complementary rather than antagonistic, and refrained from competing with each other in elections. But the movement was more than a collection of institutions. It was an expression of a certain consciousness, which asserted that the problems faced by workers were not behavioural in origin, but economic and social. It was a consciousness based on shared experience and common struggles, and a recognition of the power of collective rather than individual action. In short, it was a class consciousness which asserted the special claims of Labour as against Capital.

But the movement was very loosely defined and contained many and diverse elements, for the consciousness of its members and supporters was by no means homogeneous. The class consciousness which the Bristol Labour movement expressed was by no means militantly socialistic at all levels;

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1. W.D.P., 1-18 January 1918; B.T.M. ibid.; F. Sheppard papers.
2. A good example of this kind of thinking was provided at the Trades Council meeting in December 1910 which discussed 'the scourge of Consumption'. Amongst the many speakers the young Ernest Bevin was prominent. He argued that 'consumption is the scourge of the working classes, and is due largely to the factory system, bad housing, bad food, and the other things brought about by poverty and the industrial system of today.' Some of his proposed remedies would appear to have been rather fanciful, such as his suggestion that co-operative farms should be established to provide T.B. victims with work in the open air; he also suggested, however, that organised labour might take some positive steps. 'The treatment of the sick', he said, 'has to come on (sic) the community as a whole, and the sooner the better ... The organised Trade Unionists of Bristol should demand that the City Council should provide better accommodation for those suffering from consumption.' W.D.P., 16 Dec. 1910.

it ranged from the mild Lib-Lab to the rather more doctrinaire views of some of the B.S.S. members. The temperance movement was well represented within its ranks, and the Christian Socialists were still much in evidence, although they had enjoyed their hey-day in the 1880's. This diversity was itself, partly a reflection of the multifarious industrial structure of the city, and the vast differences in technical development, scale of operation, and type of ownership, between those industries, which inevitably influenced although not necessarily directly, the varying consciousness of the different sections of the local working class. In some ways this very diversity had a positive effect, for it produced a strong emphasis on the need for unity and on the concept of the 'movement' as the expression of that unity. Such an emphasis would not have been found in other, more internally homogeneous movements elsewhere, particularly those on the coal-fields. There were still in Bristol, as we have seen, often quite extreme manifestations of sectionalism among the unions, but a growing political consciousness, particularly among the most advanced trades unionists, expressed itself in a growing attachment to the Labour movement.

Yet it was precisely these attitudes on the part of the more advanced workers that tended to separate them from the broad mass of their fellow workers, and this separation was perhaps sharper in Bristol than, for example, in the Labour movements on the coalfields because of the particular features of the local environment. For the crucial point about the Bristol Labour movement, as it stood in 1910, was its minority position, not merely within society as a whole, but also within the local working class. In its own membership, there were enormous gaps; the typical trades unionist was still the Labour aristocrat, whose political affiliation tended more towards the Liberals. The broad mass of unskilled workers, by and large, had very little contact with the movement, either at the trades union or at the political levels. The

movement was striving for independence, and this could only be achieved if it could build support for its policies among this broad mass of workers, many of whom were either Liberal voters, or non-voters. What kind of movement could best attract their support, with what kind of programme, and on the basis of what kind of relationship with the Liberal party, were questions that still required answers. Until the L.R.C., in particular, could find answers and thereby demonstrate that the movement was politically capable of standing on its own feet further progress was impossible. In the years immediately before 1910 attempts to break free of the Liberal entanglement met with depressing results, and the L.R.C. seemed no nearer a solution to its problems. Further development had to wait on movement within the working class itself, and events in 1910, which will be studied in the next chapter, provided some evidence that some sections of the class were beginning to awaken from their prolonged quiescent state at the advent of our period.

CHAPTER TWO

Pre-War Militancy

Industrial conflict was a major component of the acute social tensions that afflicted British society in the years immediately preceding World War I. The story of the numerous strikes, both local and national, has been told in a number of studies.[1] Most begin the narrative in 1911, the year of the great transport and railway strikes. In the Bristol Channel area, however, signs of a reawakening of the spirit of 1889 appeared in 1910. In May 1910 Messrs. Houlders' Brothers, shipowners, became involved in a dispute with the Dockers' Union at Newport.[2] The fight was long and bitter, with Houlders' bringing in Shipping Federation 'free' labourers to break the strike, and then, in June, diverting a ship, The Natal Transport, to Avonmouth. Dockers there refused to load the ship and demanded that it be withdrawn.[3]

Union and management were taken completely by surprise by this turn of events. As a correspondent of the W.D.P. commented: 'For some years Bristol has been happily free from any serious disputes between employers and employees'.[4] Indeed, this strike in sympathy with Newport dockers by a labour force which had been relatively quiescent since the bitter struggles of the years 1889-1893, was all the more remarkable in view of the low level of union organisation that obtained on the Bristol docks.

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1. The story of the famous London dock strike of 1911 was narrated by its leader, Tillett in a History of the London Transport Workers' Strike, (1912). A more comprehensive study is that of J. Lovell, Stevedores and Dockers, (1969). G. Askwith, the Government's Conciliator, told the story of the strikes in which he was involved in his Industrial Problems and Disputes, (1920). Studies of the other major national stoppages can be found in R. Page Arnot, The Miners, Years of Struggle, (1953) and P. S. Bagwell, The Railwaymen, (1963).
2. G. A. Phillips, 'The National Transport Workers' Federation, 1910-1927', (Oxford D.Phil. 1968), p.69.
3. W.D.P., 22 June 1910.
4. W.D.P., 23 June 1910.

Since the mid-1890's, the Dockers' Union in Bristol, as elsewhere, had suffered a decline in membership. Its survival had been due to its ability to maintain a core of organisation among corn and grain porters, who formed a relatively select community among waterfront workers, buttressed by a high occupational solidarity. Deal runners and general dock labourers were unorganised in 1910. When non-union deal runners had struck for a wage increase in 1907 they looked not to the Dockers' Union for support, but to another general union, the Gasworkers and General Labourers' Union and a deal runners branch of that organisation was formed, but collapsed in 1909.[1]

The union's survival was also due to its ability to retain employers' recognition, and thus to preserve a bargaining function. Union officials had become entrenched within the Bristol and District Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, and in the Corn Trade Conciliation Board.[2] But this involvement forced the union to disavow militancy and to use its influence to prevent unofficial stoppages in the Docks. Tillett intervened in a strike in 1900 to end an unofficial stoppage, and during these years consistently advocated compulsory arbitration.[3] From the union's point of view such a policy had both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, recognition by employers helped the union maintain its organisation. But the enforced disavowal of militancy, and the growing commitment to the processes of conciliation and arbitration created the danger that the union officials would lose touch with their members, thereby increasing the possibility of unofficial action. This had been

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1. I am indebted for this background information to P. Leng, for allowing me to consult his unpublished M.A. (Kent) thesis on the 'Dockers' Union in Bristol Channel and South Wales, 1889-1921'.
2. The Bristol and District Board of Conciliation and Arbitration was in operation in the early 1890's. Both the disputes connected with the Black Friday incidents (see above p.28) were referred to the Board by the unions involved - the Gasworkers and the Dockers. The Corn Trade Conciliation Board was established under a specific agreement of 1900.
3. P. Leng, op.cit.

a factor in the 1907 decision of the deal runners to seek the help of the Gasworkers' Union. In June, 1910, when a movement developed at Avonmouth which involved both union and non-union dockers, the union officials were out-flanked and unable to control the situation. At first, union members and non-unionists congregated outside the union office, demanding leadership, but the local secretary, W. Gorman,[1] could only advise a return to work. Having failed to win his support, the strikers organised the dispute themselves. A deputation was dispatched to Newport to ascertain the situation there, and a committee of nine was elected to negotiate with the Docks Committee.[2]

Whilst negotiations were in progress, a deputation from Newport arrived and explained that dockers there were not on strike but refusing to work any Houlders' ships which were being loaded by Shipping Federation men. On their advice, work was restarted in Bristol on this same basis. The next day, however, the docks were again stopped when the Docks Committee refused to withdraw permanent hands, such as crane drivers and supervisory foremen, from The Natal Transport, which was now being worked by Federation men. Such was the pressure exerted by the strikers that all the permanent men were induced to join them, except three foremen employed by G. King Ltd., the stevedoring company, who had been put to work supervising the Federation men. The issue in dispute now changed from the original demand that The Natal Transport be withdrawn, to insistence that these three foremen be removed altogether from the dock estate. Again a rank and file deputation was sent to place these demands before the Docks Committee.[3]

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1. William Gorman, a corn-porter by trade, had been District Secretary of the Dockers' Union in Bristol since the early 1890's.
2. W.D.P., 23 June 1910; B.T.M., ibid.
3. W.D.P., 25 June 1910.

The reason why this dispute should have occurred at this time is not exactly clear. Dock workers, because of the casual nature of their trade, were notoriously prone to outbreaks of unofficial strikes, and there had been a number of small-scale stoppages in previous years. The conditions of working in the industry were responsible for a legacy of discontent that sometimes led workers to burst through the barriers of economic, procedural and legal restraint. Dock workers were poorly paid, and Bristol dockers more so than others. The day wage rate of 6s. 6d. in 1911 compared unfavourably with that paid across the Channel, in Newport of 8s.[1] The union had done little in the previous decade to remedy the situation, at a time when the cost of living was rising. Yet this strike was not about wages. It involved issues of basic trade union rights and pointed up the conflict that inevitably arises when an assertion of these rights poses a challenge to the ability of employers to manage their businesses as they thought fit. The Avonmouth dockers were challenging the ability of Houlders to defeat industrial action by switching ships from port to port, by employing Federation labourers to take the place of strikers, and by employing permanent hands to supervise this work. There was a fear, expressed by the strikers, that their own job prospects would be endangered if 'strangers' were taught a skill that had been handed down to them by their forefathers.[2] This provides a clue to the strikers' attitudes, for it reveals that waterfront workers as a whole, despite the casual nature of their work, and despite the division between union and non-union men, formed a relatively closed community, and one that possessed a fairly high degree of internal cohesion. This was so even although there was no particular locality in Bristol which can be positively identified as a dockers' community.

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1. P. Leng, op.cit.
2. W.D.P., 25 June 1910.

Solidarity seems to have come naturally to them, whether they were unionised or not, and it was this expression of solidarity, and the demand that foremen, too, were bound by its unwritten rules which posed a threat to the employer's right to manage.

The union had never taken a stand on this ground. Thus when Tillett intervened in the strike, he directed his famous invective not at the employers, but at the strikers. 'You are acting like children in asking for the foremen to be marched out in this way,' he told them.[1] He quite agreed, he said, with the attitude of the employers. Nevertheless, he had obtained from the employers the concession that the foremen should be taken off the ship, though not off the docks altogether, and on this temporary arrangement the men agreed to return.[2]

The first priority of the union officials was to regain control over their own members. The leader of the rank and file committee, W. Jackson, was persuaded to recommend a return. The next day, a mass meeting of union members only was held behind locked doors, instead of outside the dock gates; the manoeuvre was successful for the meeting agreed to allow Kings to appoint their own supervisory foremen, and promised to work on all ships, in whatever ownership, after The Natal Transport had sailed. The union's intervention, it seemed, had successfully averted a serious situation arising on the Bristol docks. But in reality the agreement merely papered over the cracks. The three foremen at the centre of the dispute were discreetly removed from the scene for three weeks, but in the intervening period, it seems, the employers made extensive preparations for a confrontation with the Bristol and Avonmouth dockers. When the foremen again put in an appearance at Avonmouth another strike resulted.[3]

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1. W.D.P., 27 June 1910.
2. W.D.P., 28 June 1910.
3. W.D.P., 13 July 1910; B.T.M., ibid.

During the next two or three days, trainloads of Federation men were brought into Bristol, and the Federation depot ship, Lady Jocelyn, crossed the channel from Newport. This escalation of the dispute provoked an immediate reaction in the Bristol City docks, where workers struck in sympathy with Avonmouth; Portishead dockers soon followed suit. All sections of the dock labour force were involved - corn-porters, general cargo men, deal runners, lightermen, and warehousemen, and finally shunters and employees of the Docks engineering department joined in, bringing the whole port to a standstill, save for the work being done by Federation men.[1]

Again the Dockers' Union was overtaken by events, and in the early stages the direction of the strike was in the hands of a rank and file committee. But this committee was unable to get support from other union bodies in the city. The Trades Council refused to support it, and Gasworkers congratulated the Dockers, a week after the strike began, that the 'officials were once more in charge of the negotiations in the unfortunate dispute.'[2] But control over the negotiations was not the same as control over the men and when the officials advised their members to accept arbitration their advice was rejected, and the officials began to prepare, somewhat reluctantly, for a long struggle.

The dispute was beginning to attract the attention of the wider labour movement in Bristol. After negotiations broke down, the strike committee was broadened into a Docks Dispute Council, including representatives of the Trades Council, and 'other men interested in the situation', such as councillor Frank Sheppard, who took the chair.[3] The I.L.P., too, was interested and its newly appointed General Secretary, Walter Ayles, chaired the Finance sub-committee. The Bristol Socialist

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1. W.D.P., 14-18 July 1910; B.T.M., ibid.
2. W.D.P., 21 July 1910.
3. W.D.P., 21 July 1910.

Society, a branch of the S.D.P., declared its support, and one of its members, Ernest Bevin, was placed in charge of a small local relief fund.[1]

The involvement of the Dockers' Union's allies among the socialist groups brought to the dispute a broader significance. Since the docks were under municipal ownership, an appeal to public opinion as a means of placing pressure on the Corporation could be of value to the union. The socialist groupings and the Trades Council were best placed to make that appeal. But a resort to public opinion placed obligations on the union officials, for they had to be seen to be in control of the strike: when strikers clashed with police escorting a cart carrying supplies to Avonmouth, union officials hastened to dissociate themselves from lawlessness, which, they claimed, was the work of 'semi-hooligans', and 'scalliwags' who only wanted 'cheap booze'.[2] There was a small Labour group on the City Council - six councillors and one alderman - and these, too, put pressure on the Docks Committee to be more conciliatory. But the strike created a crisis in the Labour group, for the Labour representative on the Docks Committee, W. G. Pope, refused to identify himself with the strikers' cause. Indeed, throughout the dispute he stressed that strike action could only endanger the efforts of the Docks Committee to attract more trade to the port.[3] His attitude prompted Tillett to demand of him whom he represented, the Shipping Federation or the working class of Bristol. Pope, essentially a Lib-Lab. councillor, found himself isolated in the Labour Group, the rest of whom identified with the strikers' cause, and caused him to break finally with the L.R.C. in the following municipal elections, when he stood as an independent.[4]

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1. B.S.S., Mins. 1910-1912; A. Bullock, op.cit., Vol.I, p.22.
2. W.D.P., 19 July 1910.
3. W.D.P., 23 July 1910.
4. W.D.P., 2 November 1910.

Just as the Labour movement was preparing itself for a struggle comparable to those of the early 1890's, the dispute was settled. The crucial factor here again seems to have been the union officials' success in gaining control over the strike, for the settlement gave the dockers very little that they had not already been offered. They were to return to work when all the Federation men had been withdrawn, to work on all vessels of whatever ownership, but were not to be victimised for having taken part in the strike. On the key issue of the foremen, a Committee of Enquiry under the Labour M.P., D. Shackleton, was to be set up to look into the 'work and antecedents of the foremen'.[1] This relatively modest gain was hailed as a great victory by the union officials. In some ways the union had indeed scored considerable success. The form and composition of the Committee of Enquiry was a recognition of the union's strength; for the first time since the early 1890's the union had taken on the Docks Committee, the employers and the Shipping Federation, and had not been crushed. The membership of the union reflected this change. The Dockers' Record for September 1910 claimed that over 2000 members had enrolled in the past month and that card inspections were the order of the day.

The gains were not confined to the docks. In August, Bevin set about building the carters' branch of the Dockers' Union because, as he pointed out at one of the first branch meetings, during the dispute the carters had been called upon by their employers 'to do work that was very unpalatable to them'.[2] The branch grew rapidly. In December the Record claimed a membership of 500 and observed that 'They should prove a valuable ally to the Dockers.' Carters' wages and conditions were subject to no regulations. Most were employed by small haulage firms, which hampered union organisation. Many, however, were engaged in

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1. W.D.P., 25 July 1910; D.R., September 1910.
2. W.D.P., 12 September 1910; A. Bullock, op.cit., pp.22-23.

moving goods to and from the docks, and were thus in contact with unionised dockers. Moreover because of the largely unskilled nature of their occupation, there was normally a surplus of labour competing for work, causing chronic under-employment and depressed wages. The traditional response of unskilled workers to this system was to seek casual work at the docks. The fortunes of the dock and road transport industries were closely linked, and much of the labour for them was drawn from the same casual pool. Unionisation of the dockers was logically followed by unionisation of carters. But the Dockers' Union, until 1910, had shown itself to be uninterested in workers outside the docks, and it was the Gasworkers' Union which had previously tried to organise among transport workers, though with little success.[1] It was the attempt to employ carters as strike-breakers in 1910 that awoke the Dockers' Union officials to the need to organise outside their own immediate sphere.

Together with the union district officials, Bevin opened negotiations with the Bristol Cart-owners and Warehousekeepers Association for a comprehensive agreement covering wages, hours, conditions and union recognition.[2] During February and March 1911, a strike seemed likely, but the intervention of the Lord Mayor and Chamber of Commerce as conciliators prevented a stoppage. The final agreement, signed in April, secured for the union important concessions.[3] Recognition was granted and a Joint Arbitration Board with seven representatives of each side was set up to regulate any future disputes. The agreement regulated wages, hours, and even holiday pay, but the most important provisions were those which regulated the work itself, by laying down rules on manning and loading. Thus, after the outbreak of strike action in the summer of

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1. c.f. Gasworkers' attempts to organise tramwaymen in 1901; see B. Atkinson, op.cit., pp.279-283.
2. W.D.P., 27 February 1911.
3. W.D.P., 3 April 1911; B.T.M., ibid.

1910, the union officials continued to pursue their objectives by relying very much on the processes of conciliation and arbitration.

For a year, then, the local union officials seemed to have the situation in the docks and transport industries well under control. But in the summer of 1911 there occurred in Bristol, as elsewhere, an explosion of trade union militancy such as had not been seen since 1889. The upsurge occurred mainly in the transport industries - seamen, dockers, carters, and railwaymen - but there was also a major battle in the Bristol coalfield. This was the year of the great London dock strike, the seamen's strike, a near general strike in Liverpool, and the first national railway strike, to say nothing of the innumerable conflicts which affected particularly the ports, and which kept the Government's conciliator, Sir George Askwith, working at fever pitch.[1] The major struggles stand out as landmarks in working class history. Equally important, however, were the innumerable local disputes, which, whilst being clearly distinguishable from the rest by the particular issues involved, shared certain common characteristics. Firstly, the very use of the strike weapon was contagious and provoked stoppages in other industries. Secondly, although most strikes were related to specific local grievances, many were also spontaneous sympathy stoppages, in which the workers involved had no initial aim of their own. The 1911 movement was characterised by the high level of solidarity manifested by the workers involved, as witnessed by Askwith who has remarked on his exasperation at the refusal of workers to return to work until the demands of all the groups of men on strike had been met.

The struggle in Bristol divided into two distinct phases, with something of a lull between them. On June 3, seamen's strikes started

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1. G. Askwith, Industrial Problems and Disputes, (London 1920).

in various ports and, ten days later, an official national strike for a 10s. per month wage increase, was declared.[1] In Bristol the strike was slow to gather momentum and within two weeks, when most of the men working for the main shipping lines had settled at 32s. 6d. per week, the W.D.P. claimed that the strike was nearly over.[2] But the strike continued on the Bristol Steam Navigation Co. Line for the original demand. At this point the dockers began to take a hand, the first week of July witnessed minor stoppages by 'coalies' and deal runners. On July 3, the first sympathy strike occurred when dockers refused to unload an Elders and Fyffes liner diverted from strikebound Manchester.[3] Pleas to the men to continue working on the grounds that Manchester dockers had unloaded ships diverted there during the 1910 dispute, went unheeded until the Manchester dockers themselves recommended that the ship be unloaded.

As soon as this strike had been settled, another began. On July 1st, the local carter's agreement came into force, but several employers who were not party to it continued to pay the old wages. On July 6th several hundred dockers refused to load carts belonging to these firms, and it was with great difficulty that the union officials persuaded their members to resume work pending negotiations.[4] Other issues brought a rash of new strikes a week later. Dockers working on the Glasgow boat stopped work because the crew were non-union; those working on Bristol Steam Navigation boats struck in sympathy with the seamen whose strike was still going on; 800 grain porters struck in protest against the provision of highsided railway trucks, the loading of which they regarded

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1. G. A. Phillips, op.cit., p.80.
2. W.D.P., 28 June 1911.
3. W.D.P., 4 July 1911; B.T.M., ibid.
4. W.D.P., 7 July 1911; B.T.M., ibid.

as dangerous; and the deal runners struck in sympathy with everyone else.[1] The sympathy strikes were quickly called off, but the grain porters dispute proved more intractable, and during the next week spread to other Bristol Channel ports. Finally the employers conceded the demand and the strike ended.[2] But the defeat of the Bristol Steam Navigation's seamen's strike on July 23rd heralded the end of the first phase of the strike movement, which, apart from the seamen's dispute, was characterised by small skirmishing, and was confined to dockers and seamen.

Throughout this phase the Dockers' Union officials were dragged along in the wake of events, complaining that their members' enthusiasm for strike action only made their task more difficult, and stressing the necessity of abiding by agreements. In August, however, during the London dock strike, union officials, and Tillett in particular, once again projected a militant image that enabled them to keep abreast of events. It was perhaps the example of Tillett, and the success of the London strike, which prompted the Dockers' Union officials in Bristol to play a more positive role in August when the second phase began. Not to have done so would have been to allow a volatile situation to pass completely out of their control.

It was the goods workers employed by the Great Western Railway who sparked off the second wave of strikes. On 6th August they met to formulate their demands, which included an increase in wages, and the abolition of the bonus system.[3] This movement, involving checkers, porters, stowers, callers-off at the goods yards, the railway carters,

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1. W.D.P., 14 July 1911; B.T.M., ibid.
2. W.D.P., 18 July 1911; B.T.M., ibid.
3. B.T.M., 7 August 1911.

and even the railway police, was independent of the Liverpool strike in progress at the same time. When the G.W.R. refused the men's demands, strike action resulted. The Midland Railway goods workers were asked for support, but, whilst they pledged verbal backing, they would not strike themselves. The Dockers, however, took an interest in the situation and the W.D.P. reported that '... it has only been with the greatest difficulty that the leaders could persuade the men to keep at work.'[1] Because of the interlocking of the various parts of the transport industry, a strike in one part quickly reverberated through the system. Carters employed by the railway companies paid frequent visits to the docks. Carters employed by private haulage firms, many of them members of the Dockers' Union, called at the railway goods depots. A large part of the goods passing through the docks was conveyed by rail. When railway services stopped, the amount of dock work available gradually declined. On August 17th the national railway strike was declared, and the local stoppage was thus drawn into a wider movement. On the previous day, bargemen had struck for higher wages, and another means of moving goods off the docks was blocked.[2] With the docks in danger of grinding to a halt the Dockers' Union officials dropped their opposition to strike action and allowed a mass meeting to decide the issue. On 18th August, 6000 dockers and carters joined the railwaymen on strike.[3]

While primarily ceasing work in sympathy with the railwaymen, the dockers and carters were quick to formulate their own demands. Bristol dockers took up the demand of their London comrades for 8d. per hour (day) and 1s. per hour (night), minimum wage rates. They demanded also full

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1. W.D.P., 19 August 1911.
2. W.D.P., 16 August 1911.
3. W.D.P., 19 August 1911; B.T.M., ibid.

recognition of the union where this had been refused, the settlement of all demands submitted before the strike, complete legal immunity 'on this occasion', no victimisation, and an undertaking on the part of employers to meet union representatives to settle outstanding grievances.[1] But the most important demand from the union point of view was the removal of the clause in local agreements which stipulated that union labour should work with non-union workers. The union was making a bid for a monopoly of dock labour, a far more militant posture than union officials had previously been willing to adopt. In part this reflected new local personnel at the union offices. The District Secretary Gorman had been replaced by H. Geater, a younger man, and Bevin was already achieving prominence within the union.[2] He was by this time one of the four investigators on the local staff. The unofficial leader of 1910, W. Jackson, was brought within the union's official orbit by being employed as a part-time negotiator and investigator, and shared the platform at mass meetings with Bevin and Geater. By thus demonstrating flexibility, and an ability to respond to militant pressure from below, the union officials succeeded in retaining control.

Over the weekend of 19th - 20th August the "strike fever was at its height."[3] It was announced that the strike was to be conducted on a "more comprehensive basis, so as to include other branches of labour." A vigorous picketing campaign which attempted to close the railway goods yards was countered by the use of troops. A detachment of soldiers was moved into Horfield barracks and over the weekend were deployed on guard duty at stations, goods depots and signal boxes. The Lord Mayor and

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1. W.D.P., 21 August 1911; B.T.M., ibid.
2. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Annual Reports, 1910, 1911.
3. W.D.P., 21 August 1911; B.T.M., ibid.

J.P.s issued an appeal for special constable volunteers. On the Saturday evening a violent incident occurred in Bedminster when a crowd of strikers attacked a signal box where a railwayman was still working. A party of soldiers who were sent to the scene fired three rounds over the heads of the crowd. This action, followed by a police baton charge, dispersed the crowd.[1]

At that moment, in London, the railway strike was in the course of being settled. Thus on the following day, whilst the railwaymen were holding their victory celebration, the dockers were meeting on the Downs to rally behind their own demands. Cracks in their solidarity were beginning to appear. The dockers demanded, and their demand was echoed by Ayles, a speaker at the meeting, that no section should return to work until the grievances of all had been settled. The railwaymen claimed that they had been under the impression that the dockers had no grievances of their own, but had struck in sympathy. Thus when the railwaymen returned to work the following morning, they were confronted with dockers' and carters' pickets. A.S.R.S. officials, however, persuaded their members to remain loyal to their union's decision. The dockers and carters fought on alone.[2]

They were not without bargaining power, however, and the employers were induced to enter into negotiations. The settlement granted recognition of the union, no victimisation, and complete legal immunity on this occasion, but on wages the union settled for less than the original demand, at 7d. and 10d. minimum wage rates.[3] The question of another advance was to be taken up with the shipowners. The Corn Trade

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1. W.D.P., 21 August 1911; B.T.M., ibid.
2. W.D.P., 22 August 1911; B.T.M., ibid.
3. W.D.P., 24 August 1911; B.T.M., ibid.

Employers and Warehousekeepers' Association undertook to negotiate a settlement with the union. But the agreement omitted to mention the union demand for a monopoly. The settlement thus fell far short of the strikers' original demands and even Tillett, a few days later, told his members not to be satisfied with the ½d. per hour increase but to fight for more. Yet the energy and solidarity generated in the strike movement of August 1911 was to be dissipated in the following months as each section pursued its claims independently.

Sectional demands had not been submerged by the general movement of transport workers. In an industry like the docks, where wages and conditions varied according to whether men were engaged in loading, unloading, or the carriage of goods, to the type of cargo being handled, and to the particular employer for whom a man was working, sectional claims inevitably occupied the minds of dockers, and the grievances of each section could not easily be reduced to a single set of demands. Nevertheless, the strike movement of 1911, which was partly inspired by, and also served to generate further the feelings of solidarity between different sections of dock workers, and between dockers and other transport workers, cannot simply be reduced to the sum total of the grievances of every section. The very solidarity itself, and the willingness, particularly of the dockers, to take sympathy strike action, widened the movement beyond sectional grievances. Yet, on the other hand, the situation was brought under control by the forces of the state, the employers, and the union officials, each in their different ways, by playing on sectional differences, and settling each dispute separately. The end of the railway strike inevitably meant the end of the whole movement, and the retreat by the dockers and carters into their own separate claims.

In their militancy the dockers, carters and railwaymen of 1911 echoed the strike movement of 1889-1893. But that earlier movement had involved many other groups of workers than transport workers. Apart from the gasworkers, there were strikes by cotton operatives, tobacco workers, hatters, tailoresses, confectionery workers, the metal trades and a host of other groups who had been previously unorganised.[1] Since that time, trade unionism had been largely eradicated amongst these other groups, except the gasworkers, and in 1911, the Bristol movement was almost entirely confined to the transport trades. In London, by way of contrast, the movement spread to the factories and workshops. Why this did not happen in Bristol must remain something of a mystery. Conditions in the big factories of Wills and Frys were reputedly good by contrast with the smaller shops operating in the same trades.[2] But there was ample room for discontent with the sweating in the local clothing trades,[3] and with the low wages predominating in the metal and chemical industries. Hostility to trades unionism on the part of employers in these trades can provide part of the explanation. The attitude of the unions themselves was also important. As in 1889, the Dockers' Union was almost purely concerned with docks problems - although it had begun to organise among the carters as well - whilst the Gasworkers Union, which had been active in organising these workers in 1889, showed no inclination at all to make another attempt to organise the general workers, for reasons that remain obscure. The next chapter shows that the trend towards trade union membership among, for example, the factory trades of Bristol was delayed until the later years of the war.

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1. B. Atkinson, op.cit., Ch. V, pp.206-219; S. Bryher, op.cit., pp.15-21.
2. B. Alford, op.cit., passim.
3. Bristol Sweated Industries Exhibition, Handbook, 1908.

The absence from these struggles of a broader-based organisation such as the Trades Council may have been significant. In 1889, although most strikes had started spontaneously, the existence of a Strike Organising Committee, set up by the Trades Council and local socialists, to which strikers could turn for assistance, was a helpful factor.[1] The Trades Council had intervened in the 1910 docks dispute, but in 1911 was conspicuous by its absence, and, indeed, may not have been functioning at the time. There is no reference to any activity by the Council between December 1910 and April 1912 in the local press.[2]

The miners, however, became involved in strike action in 1911, although in a dispute which was entirely separate from those already mentioned. On 18 August two of the six remaining Bristol pits were stopped by a strike for increased wages.[3] The miners' agent, William Whitefield, immediately disowned the strikers, about 40% of whom were non-unionists. The conflict that developed between the Bristol Miners' Association and the strikers thus bore certain similarities to the struggle on the docks a year before, when the non-unionists had proved more militant than their unionised comrades, and the authority of the union officials was put to the test. The unofficial miners' strike spread to other pits in the area as the demand for a wage increase was taken up. The union would not support the strike, but its members were beginning to break through the institutional restraints and a concession to their militancy was necessary. A ballot was therefore held on strike action and a majority voted in favour, but all-out action was averted by the setting up of a Board of Trade enquiry into whether the local owners

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1. Bryher, op.cit.
2. The destruction of the Trades Council's own records means that the Council's role in these events must remain a matter of speculation.
3. W.D.P., 19 August 1911.

could afford to pay an increase.[1] The occasion for this display of militancy was the recent award of a wage increase to Somerset miners, to whom Bristol miners were traditionally linked on matters of wages. The Board of Trade enquiry reported that the local owners could not afford to pay and that the wage demand should be withdrawn, but an unofficial strike of the whole coalfield had already begun in early September, against the advice of Whitefield, and without waiting for the report.[2] Somewhat belatedly, the Miners' Federation agreed, in early October, to give financial support to the strikers.[3]

The Bristol Miners' Association had been founded in 1889, and its members had invited Whitefield, a Northumbrian, to act as their agent. In its early years, through a series of bitter battles, the B.M.A. had vigorously opposed arbitration. But a sustained counter-offensive by the employers in the mid-1890's had pushed the union onto the defensive, and Whitefield was to be found during the late 1890's and early 20th century charting a thoroughly moderate course.[4] The union lost members and the wages in the Bristol coalfield fell behind those paid elsewhere. In part this reflected the weak economic position of the coalfield and its inability to compete with more favoured areas except by paying lower wages. This was the factor uppermost in Whitefield's mind when he argued against militancy, for strikes, he maintained, would only bring ruin to the coalfield and miners alike. His members, however, subject to the pressure of inflation, were less intimidated by the threat of pit closures, and, together with non-unionists, dragged the union into a fight with the employers. The miners' forces were weak, and despite considerable public

1. W.D.P., 30 August 1911.
2. W.D.P., 5 September 1911.
3. W.D.P., 9 October 1911.
4. B. Atkinson, op.cit., pp.238-244.

sympathy, they were forced back to work in November having only secured half the increase demanded.[1]

The re-emergence of militancy during 1910-1911 brought about changes in the trade union world which will be examined in the next chapter. The strikes also had an impact on the wider Labour movement. The events of 1889 and the early 1890's had involved a large part of the Labour movement in a united attempt to spread unionisation and win concessions.[2] Local socialists had played a prominent part in the agitation, just as in the more famous strikes in London. There was, then, a tradition of socialist intervention in strike activity. To a certain extent, this tradition was revived in 1910 and 1911, despite the fact that the Trades Council was inactive during the latter period. Ayles, Sheppard and Bevin served on the Docks Dispute Council in 1910 and spoke at meetings. In 1911 Ayles and Sheppard were again to be found on the strike platforms. From the point of view of the strikers it was encouraging to be able to attract support from outsiders. The socialists were interested in these disputes because they were outside the run of normal industrial conflicts. In that they were an expression of open class conflict, they tended to involve the whole Labour movement. Moreover, in a situation where workers were willing to take sympathetic strike action, and where they were met with the use of troops and police and blackleg labour, they were more likely to be open to socialist ideas. Ayles of the I.L.P. tried to relate his conception of socialism to the struggle in which his audience were engaged. In 1910, for example, he told dockers that the issue at stake was whether they were going to allow their masters to use them as slaves any longer, or whether they

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1. W.D.P., 16 November 1911.
2. B. Atkinson, op.cit.; S. Bryher, op.cit.

were going to insist on the right to have a say as to their working conditions.[1] But the I.L.P., as a group, does not seem to have been active among the strikers in an attempt to build a base for Ayles' ideas.

The lines of demarcation between political and trade union action were not as rigidly defined in minds of socialists and trade unionists in 1911 as they later became. Nevertheless, changes had occurred since 1889 when socialists were able to intervene with the blessing of the trade union leaders. Firstly, those very trade union leaders, such as Thorne and Tillett, were no longer the militant socialists that they had once been. In the conduct of their union affairs, at least, they had turned to more moderate, defensive policies. The outbreak of spontaneous strikes which threatened to go well beyond the narrow limits which the union leaderships attempted to impose upon them, were a threat to those policies. A gap was opened up between the union officials and the strikers, both unionists and non-unionists, who were refusing to be bound any longer by the restraints of the conciliation and arbitration processes. This gap was to a certain extent bridged by the flexibility of the union officials, who placed themselves at the head of the movement after having resisted it for some time. But there was no doubt that the enthusiasm for strike action came from the rank and file. In intervening in this situation, then, the socialists, who would not necessarily share the narrow conceptions of many of the trade union leaders, were in an ambivalent position. Ayles, for example, advised a mass meeting in August 1911 not to return to work until the demands of all sections had been satisfied. This was not the policy of the trade union officials, whose concerns were overwhelmingly sectional, but it was they who had invited men like Ayles to take the platform.

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1. W.D.P., 22 July 1910.

The potential conflict between the two positions never became an open breach. Ayles and the I.L.P. regarded themselves as outsiders in these struggles, and only intervened at the invitation of the union officials. There was no attempt to link up with the informal rank and file leadership, yet it was at that level that they would have had to organise if Ayles' advice had been taken seriously. The same was true of the Bristol Socialist Society, which had been very active in 1889. Since that time the B.S.S. had lost much of its earlier militancy. In June 1910 there were complaints from some members at the non-militant attitude of the B.S.S., which, they claimed, was responsible for the formation of a local branch of the Socialist Labour Party.[1] The B.S.S. was, moreover, closely linked to the trade union leaders. Mrs. Tillett was a notable member of the branch. There was thus little prospect that the B.S.S. would intervene to press a more militant policy.

In the Newport strike of 1910 there was evidence of syndicalist influence among the strikers themselves.[2] This was a period when, in a number of industries and areas, syndicalist views, which stressed the need for rank and file organisation to press a more militant policy on the union leaders, were beginning to gain a wide currency. In the South Wales Coalfield, for example, an Unofficial Reform Committee was established and produced a widely read pamphlet, the Miners' Next Step, which advocated democratisation of the Miners' Federation. Dissatisfaction on the part of rank and file trade unionists seems to have been fairly widespread in this period, and the Bristol strikes bear witness to it. But in Bristol no effective, independent, rank and file leadership emerged, syndicalist or otherwise. Despite the fact that the rank and

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1. B.S.S., Mins., 5 June 1910.
2. P. Long, op.cit.

file took the initiative in all the strikes in 1910 and 1911, they immediately turned to the local officials for assistance. They were capable of forming ad hoc rank and file strike committees, but not capable of carrying a strike through to a conclusion without the help of their officials. Groups like the S.L.P., although there is evidence that a branch existed in Bristol,[1] had little or no influence in these strikes.

In inviting Ayles and Sheppard on to mass meeting platforms the union officials had a particular aim in mind. Political organisations were useful in putting out an appeal to public opinion. There is no doubt that this was a factor uppermost in the minds of union officials, and particularly so in the docks where every dispute involved the Corporation Docks Committee. In their speeches union leaders were speaking not merely to their immediate audience but to a wider public, through the medium of press reports. Thus Bevin in 1911, pleaded the cause of trades unionism, and Sheppard appealed to the '... public to consider the men's views apart from prejudice, for he could assure them that the demands they were making were for a reasonable living wage.'[2] Sheppard was especially useful to the union in this context since he was a well-respected figure in employers' and political circles, whose 'reasonableness' was frequently commented upon.[3]

The B.S.S. and the I.L.P. were content to fulfil this role. Moreover, they were not concerned with promoting a more militant trade union policy, for both stressed the primacy of political action through the ballot box as the means to remedy working class grievances. Thus the B.S.S. sent a message to the dockers in July 1910 congratulating them on their

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1. W. Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Great Britain 1900-1921, (1969), p.72.
2. W.D.P., 21 August 1911.
3. For F. Sheppard's career, see Biographical Appendix, p.402.

victory, and urged them '... to be directly represented on the Town Council and Docks Committee at the next November election.'[1] Hyndman's view that the S.D.P. was '... opposed to strikes altogether. They never were a powerful weapon, and now they are quite out of date',[2] was not entirely endorsed by the B.S.S., but that body too insisted that the workers would be better occupied directing their energies to the ballot box. Ayles shared this view. Moreover, although in 1910 and 1911 he recognised the importance of the strike weapon, he was beginning to move towards a pacifist position, and in 1912 he told an audience that when a worker went on strike he only injured himself, and that force never had, nor would, improve the conditions of men. It was absolutely immoral, he said, 'to have such a thing as a class war or any other war based on strikes or force.'[3] Extreme pacifism was not the unanimous position of the I.L.P., but nevertheless, that organisation tended to look with disdain on the use of the strike weapon for purely economic ends, and stress that genuine amelioration could only come through the election of a Labour government.

In Bristol there were two possible vehicles for the furtherance of working class political representation - the B.S.S. and the L.R.C. The former, a branch of the S.D.P., still included among its members many of the original socialist pioneers of the 1880s and 1890s, such as F. Sheppard. It had been able, also, to attract some new blood - Bevin, for example. But by 1910 the B.S.S. was in decline. Its refusal to affiliate to the L.R.C. had alienated it from much potential support, and even its more prominent members such as Sheppard found they had more

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1. B.S.S., Mins., 29 July 1910.
2. J. Kendall, op.cit., p.28.
3. W.D.P., 27 October 1912. During his first few years in Bristol, Ayles was abandoning his Methodist faith in favour of the Quakers. His conversion to pacifism would seem to have been connected with the change in his religious affiliations.

to gain from working with the L.R.C. than from active involvement in the B.S.S. The society placed great emphasis on a socialist programme, and its candidates at Municipal elections stood as socialists, not as Labour candidates. The L.R.C., on the other hand, had refused to adopt a programme based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, largely because of trade union opposition. The I.L.P. had acquiesced in the much more moderate L.R.C. programme, hoping to be able to transform it from within. The B.S.S., however, had declined to affiliate, and had continued to sponsor candidates of its own. In 1910 four socialist and two Labour candidates tried for election to the Council, but none was elected.[1]

The overtures from the B.S.S. towards the dockers in 1910 reflected a growing awareness of their isolation. In 1911, in the Guardians elections, an attempt was made to foster a closer relationship with the Dockers' Union when a candidate was sponsored jointly by the two organisations in Avonmouth.[2] Moreover, since January 1911, in the wake of Labour's setbacks in November 1910, discussions had been going on about united action between the B.S.S. and L.R.C. The L.R.C. wished to build ward organisations in as many areas as possible and, unless it could come to an arrangement with the B.S.S., the two would inevitably overlap. Discussions on joint efforts continued until the summer and a tentative arrangement was worked out that allowed the B.S.S. to contest the Bedminster wards, since that was where it had done its most effective propaganda.[3] But a renewed interest in elections on the part of the Dockers' Union very nearly brought the negotiations to an end, for the dockers also claimed Bedminster East as a ward where they could expect

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1. W.D.P., 2 November 1910.
2. B.S.S., Mins., March 1911.
3. B.S.S., Mins., 1911 passim.

considerable support and, without consulting the L.R.C. or the B.S.S. nominated a candidate.[1] Other dockers' candidates were put up in St. Augustines and Westbury. At the election the B.S.S. had only one candidate, in St. George West, and he stood as a Labour candidate, not a socialist. Henceforth the B.S.S. did not prove capable of mounting an independent campaign in the municipal elections.

The L.R.C. was increasingly occupying the centre of the stage within the Labour movement. It had taken over from the Trades Council Labour Electoral Association in 1908, reflecting a desire on the part of trade unionists as well as the I.L.P. for a more independent policy. The L.E.A. had built up a small Labour group on the City Council, increasing the number of Labour councillors from three to five between 1895 and 1906, a rather modest achievement, and one that had only been possible because the Liberals had made a few concessions to Labour.[2] The L.R.C. was not immediately more successful. In 1909 there were still only six Labour councillors and one alderman, and the following year this number was reduced by two.[3] But the L.R.C. did show healthy signs of independence from the Liberals. In January 1910, Sheppard was nominated as a Labour candidate in Bristol East in the parliamentary elections, and conducted a vigorous campaign with trade union and I.L.P. support. This was the first time that a Labour candidate had fought in Bristol East, a traditionally radical Liberal seat, since 1895.[4] In January 1911, the L.R.C. announced it was to establish its own ward organisation, an essential step if it was to achieve true electoral independence.[5] But

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1. B.S.S., Mins., June 1911.
2. B. Atkinson, op.cit., pp.356-375.
3. W.D.P., 2 November 1910.
4. W.D.P., 1-17 January 1910; B.T.M., ibid.
5. B.S.S., Mins., 20 January 1911.

this step, as has been seen, was fraught with difficulties, not the least of which was the conflicting claims of the Dockers' Union and the B.S.S. There was a problem, too, with the I.L.P. which, although affiliated to the L.R.C. and the leading political group within it, was not prepared to merge its own ward organisation into that of the L.R.C. The executive Committee of the branch advised its members not to take office on the new L.R.C. ward committees because they had too much work to do for the party.[1]

Within the L.R.C. it was possible to reach a compromise over the differences between the I.L.P. and the unions. The Bedminster ward, for example, was an area where the I.L.P. too had a large number of members and expected to field a candidate. The claims of the I.L.P. and the dockers in Bedminster, St. Augustines and Westbury were reconciled by choosing candidates who were members of both.[2] But there was, nevertheless, an underlying conflict within the L.R.C. between the I.L.P. and the unions. On a number of occasions the I.L.P. threatened to disaffiliate unless they had '... more support and less secret hostility from the trade union section.'[3] There was a constant suspicion on the part of the I.L.P. members that in the election work the trade unionists were not pulling their weight, and a feeling that the I.L.P. could be more successful if it fought elections independently. The occasions when the two elements achieved successful co-ordination were singled out for special mention. Ayles, who was Hon. Treasurer of a local branch of the A.S.E., had assistance from A.S.E. members in his campaign in Easton in 1912; 'Where the Labour Party and the trade unions fight together, we can win,' he wrote, 'but where the trade unions refuse to help, the fight is much harder.'[4]

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1. I.L.P., Mins., January 1911.
2. e.g., E. H. Hatherell, St. Augustine, 1911; G. Thompson, St. Philip & Jacob. South 1911; W. Jackson, Westbury 1911. All three candidates were members of both I.L.P. and Dockers' Unions.
3. I.L.P., Mins., July 1911.
4. I.L.P., Gen. Sec. Monthly Report, November 1912.

The I.L.P. was gradually becoming the leading group within the local movement. The branch had made enormous strides since it was re-formed in 1903, and by 1910 had over 500 members, organised into ward groups, which covered most working class areas of the city - although it was notably weak in the St. Phillips area - and also spread into the middle class areas such as Redland.[1] It was strongest in Bedminster, St. Pauls and Bristol East, and in November 1910 the latter group decided to set up a separate branch in the East.[2] The appointment of Ayles as full-time secretary in 1910 greatly facilitated the organisational and propaganda work of the branch, and enabled it to increase its membership to 670 in 1912, and to extend its ward organisation into Brislington and Knowle and Totterdown. It was thus well placed to provide leadership in the L.R.C.'s electoral effort, and this was reflected in the proportion of candidates who were members of the I.L.P. - in 1911, six out of ten; 1912, four out of eight; and 1913, three out of three.[3]

But it was in the field of policy that the I.L.P. made the most important contribution. The L.R.C., due to trade union opposition, had not adopted a socialist programme. When Sheppard fought the general election in Bristol East in January 1910, his platform was radical rather than socialist. He concentrated on the issue of unemployment, but said very little about the issue of public ownership. Much of the hostility towards the I.L.P. in the L.R.C. was due to its attempts to commit that body to a programme of public ownership. But the tide was clearly swinging in favour of the I.L.P., at least in the matter of municipal policy. The Docks were already under municipal ownership, and this undoubtedly influenced the Dockers' Union into taking a more active interest in

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1. I.L.P., Monthly Reports, passim.
2. I.L.P., Mins., November 1910.
3. Biographical details of Municipal candidates were provided in the course of press reporting of election campaigns.

local politics than was common among most trade unions. The Dockers' Record was used as a medium for fostering interest by the union's membership in local elections. In June 1913 it exhorted the members '... to clearly realise that it is possible for them to capture the management of the docks through the medium of the City council.' There was considerable support, too, for the I.L.P. proposal that the tramways should be taken over by the corporation when the option came up for renewal again in 1914. The Tramways Company was notoriously anti-union, and a reminder of this fact was provided in 1914 when workers at the engineering workshops were locked out.[1] Thus when the L.R.C. campaigned in 1914 for the municipalisation of the tramways there was considerable support, even from such traditionally conservative sections as the Number I branch A.S.E., which previously had declined to affiliate to the L.R.C.[2]

The proposal to municipalise the tramways was central to the programme outlined by Ayles in a pamphlet published in 1912, Bristol's Next Step, which was to become the basis for the Labour Party's platform in local elections.[3] In it he advocated municipal control of all local service industries still in private hands, and a housing policy which included slum clearance, house improvements and council house building by direct labour. The latter proposals were particularly welcome to the building trade unions who had long taken an interest in local elections and council affairs, since much of the building work done locally was under Corporation contract. The operation of the Fair Wages Clause was of special concern to the building unions. Ayles' programme, however, was very limited in scope. Important areas such as municipal finance,

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1. Bristol Forward, 17 April 1914; W.D.P., 16 March 1914.
2. A.S.E., Bristol No. I Branch, Mins., 25 July 1914.
3. W. Ayles, Bristol's Next Step, (Bristol I.L.P. 1912).

and local action on unemployment, were not mentioned. Moreover, the whole tone of the pamphlet was a reflection of the Labour movement's position in political life at the time. Although it had established its electoral independence, it was still in the situation of a minority grouping which had little prospect of carrying through any reforms by its own strength. The pamphlet was thus as much an appeal to the middle class social conscience as it was a programme of action for the Labour movement. The mentality that regarded the Labour movement as essentially a pressure group which placed certain demands on the established parties still pervaded Labour politics to a great extent. In the 1912 municipal elections, for example, despite the fact that the L.R.C. was fielding its own candidates, the Trades Council submitted a list of questions to all candidates in much the same way as it had done in the days before independent Labour representation had been achieved.[1]

In other ways, too, the Labour movement displayed a limited conception of its own independent capacity for action. During 1910 the campaign for a Right to Work bill was still in progress, and the Bristol Right to Work Committee, set up under Trades Council auspices, had been agitating locally for the past year. The Committee demanded that the Corporation should instigate schemes of public works for unemployment relief. But its tactics were not the street demonstrations seen elsewhere; Bevin led a march to the Cathedral in 1909, a thoroughly orderly and respectable affair, and the Committee, which included representatives of the B.S.B. and the I.L.P. attempted to enlist the support of religious bodies and friendly societies as well as of the unions.[2] The aim was to present a respectable image and thereby attract the support of public opinion.

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1. W.D.P., 31 October 1912.
2. A. Bullock, op.cit., p.19; W.D.P., 14 March 1910.

The Right to Work Committee was revived briefly in 1913, when unemployment again increased, although in its second phase it adopted a more openly socialist perspective. Unemployment, the new Committee argued, could not be solved unless the workers own and control the means of life.[1]

Some parts of the movement were thus beginning to reflect the heightened class consciousness shown by the strikers in 1911. There were a number of other manifestations of this consciousness. In 1912, when the National Transport Workers' Federation called out dock workers in provincial ports in support of the London strike, Bristol dockers responded quickly.[2] Earlier in the same year a local branch of the Dockers' union had called on the Federation to declare a national transport strike in sympathy with the miners.[3] 1913 brought more strikes and more sympathy action. There was financial support from the Trades Council for strikers in Cornwall and the Black Country, and during the Dublin lock-out Bristol dockers levied themselves to provide financial support.[4] At a protest meeting in November 1913 convened by socialists and the Trades Council to demand the release from prison of the Dublin leader, Larkin, it was reported that a large section of the audience wanted a general strike in support. Syndicalism seems to have been gaining ground as a philosophy among trades unionists, and even Bevin spoke of it in approving tones. It had within it, he said, 'grand ideas and great possibilities. To put it into operation demanded a declaration of war on the whole system of capitalism.'[5]

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1. W.D.P., 27 October 1913.
2. W.D.P., 12 June 1912; B.T.M., ibid.
3. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Bristol No.3. Branch, Mins., 24 March 1912.
4. W.D.P., 16 December 1913.
5. W.D.P., 25 November 1913.

That Bevin was flirting with syndicalist ideas at this time seems clear. This is an aspect of his career which has been entirely ignored by his biographer, but it is nevertheless significant, for it is a reflection of the state of the whole movement in Bristol in the years before the war. Bevin had moved away from the B.S.S. as that body became increasingly moribund. There were a number of resignations reported in the minutes in 1910 and 1911 as some of its members began to adopt syndicalist ideas. But the syndicalism which appeared in Bristol at this time appears to have been of the vaguest kind. There was much talk of industrial unionism and the general strike, but no organised grouping which could draw together sympathy for syndicalist ideas and provide it with some direction. Tom Mann's Industrial Syndicalist Education League made no showing in Bristol. Those workers, such as the dockers and transport workers, miners, and railwaymen, who were involved in conflict and who demonstrated their solidarity with other workers involved in conflict, were left politically isolated. The B.S.S. expressed its support for their actions, as did the I.L.P. - at least at first - but the socialist grouping were unable to relate their socialist message, which was based entirely on the ballot box and political action, to the growing class consciousness of increasing numbers of workers. Thus although the Dockers' Union was undoubtedly keen on exploiting the ballot box weapon in its battles with employers and the Docks Committee, the relatively low polls for their candidates in wards where large numbers of dockers lived show an indifference towards this form of political action on the part of the rank and file. They were far more enthusiastic about the formation of the Triple Alliance in 1914, for thousands of dockers, transport workers, miners and railwaymen attended a demonstration to welcome it.[1] This event had far more significance for the rank and file than did the winning of seats on the Council.

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1. W.D.P., 6 July 1914.

The events of the pre-war years produced a heightened class consciousness in those sections of the working class who were involved in the conflicts.[1] But the political response of the Labour movement was inadequate, and the increased class consciousness was not reflected in any marked changes in the outlook of the political wing of that movement. The fact that Bristol's Next Step was an appeal to the middle-class social conscience rather than to the wide layers of trade unionists who were beginning to shake off their former passivity, demonstrated clearly that the leading political group within the movement at that time, the I.L.P., had not itself made any sharp break with the politics of accommodation of the pre-1910 era. The Labour party was still regarded as being essentially a pressure group which should aim at persuading the

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1. The year before the outbreak of war in 1914 witnessed a number of large labour demonstrations in Bristol, at which some very militant sentiments were expressed. Thus in September 1913 a meeting was held to protest at the actions of the police against strikers in Dublin and Cornwall. Mr. Hawker, President of the Trades Council, was quoted as saying that it was 'for the workers in Great Britain and Ireland to pick up the glove and throw it back in the faces of the capitalists,' whilst Mr. Cunningham, a Labour member of the Board of Guardians, hoped that they would all 'realise there is a class war' and they would 'take a conscious share in it.' (W.D.P., 8 Sept. 1913).
Later in that same year the local press reported a 'great gathering' attended by 'not far short of 4000 persons 'to hear the Irish trade union leader Larkin. Bevin was also one of the speakers and he referred to the question of a general strike. His only regret, he said, was, 'that some of those who have been talking and writing were stumbling blocks in the way of creating machinery to make such a strike possible.' If there were to be an 'organised move', he said, 'it will have to be an organised move, not a matter of leaving one section of workers to bear the brunt of the whole thing.' (W.D.P., 25 Nov. 1913).
In July 1914 a large local demonstration was held to celebrate the formation of the Triple Alliance, which was regarded by many as being the kind of organisation which Bevin had been calling for in 1913. This was described by the W.D.P. reporter as being 'one of the greatest Labour demonstrations organised locally.' Platform speakers included Smillie and Whitefield of the miners, Tillett, Bevin and R. Williams of the Transport workers, Brown of the N.U.R. and Hawker, the President of Bristol Trades Council. Hawker claimed that the demonstration was being held to 'mark, what in our opinion, is a great advance in the ranks of the labour forces,' and that they should learn the benefits of organisation from the capitalists, who had known 'no politics, no nationality, and no religion.' (W.D.P., 6 July 1914).
Whilst it is obvious that views such as these cannot be regarded as being typical of those held by ordinary trade union members in Bristol at that time, it is nevertheless significant that large numbers of workers were prepared to attend meetings and demonstrations of this kind and applaud these speeches. It is also significant that men with views like those of Mr. Hawker, could be elected to important positions within the local labour movement.

Liberals to adopt certain Labour policies, through the return of Labour councillors - albeit a limited number, given Labour's still very weak position.

In political terms, the movement learned little and gained even less from the strikes. The I.L.P.'s membership grew, but not dramatically. In municipal elections the L.R.C. still failed to achieve the significant breakthrough which had been eluding it in the years before 1910. The problem remained that unless the L.R.C. could win sufficient working class support in elections, it could not hope to become a more challenging, independent force in the city. Many had long argued that the adoption of clear socialist policies by the L.R.C. would be the first step towards achieving this electoral breakthrough, but the L.R.C. was still reluctant to do so. Both the I.L.P. and the B.S.S. were actively engaged in socialist propaganda, but neither group could connect its conception of socialism as the final answer to all workers' problems with the day to day struggles being engaged in by workers themselves. Instead, they tended to pose political action as an alternative to trade union action, rather than as a complementary form of struggle. The limitations of trade union action were frequently regarded as reasons for not engaging in it at all.

Such attitudes merely served to emphasise the isolation of the political leadership from developments that were occurring within the working class. Yet the trade unionists were themselves politically isolated, and tended to drift into a form of syndicalism where self-reliance based on economic power and trade union solidarity were seen as the best means of preparing for future struggles, which were seen in essentially economic terms. Socialist solutions do not seem to have been presented, or accepted, in other than an abstract fashion.

Changes in consciousness, however, were not the only fruits of the strikes. There were other developments within the trade unions, in terms of membership, and in terms of policy, and in many ways these tended to cut across the trends that were current among the strikers themselves. These will be the subject of the next Chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Developments in the Bristol Trade Union World, 1910-1926

The era which was ushered in by the dock strikes of 1910 was one in which trade union militancy and confrontations with the employers and state held the centre of the stage for much of the time. This situation was not finally ended until the defeat of the General Strike in 1926. The story of these struggles belongs in the narrative sections of this thesis, for we need to consider them in the wider context of the development of class relationships, and of the development of the relationships between the different constituent parts of the Labour movement. In this chapter we are concerned with questions which, although nominally internal to the trade unions, are relevant to this wider study - questions of trade union membership and of policy. These form an essential preliminary, and also a counterpoint, to the narrative.

Trade union membership, as we have seen, was conditioned by a number of factors, among which the most important were the level of economic activity, employer attitudes, state attitudes, and working class consciousness. These factors operated at both the level of total union membership and also at the level of individual industries and individual unions. Within one town, other factors assumed importance, not the least of which was the particular local industrial structure. In Bristol, the absence of any large scale heavy industry, and the predominance in many trades of small workshops, the peculiar diversity of local industry, the large proportion of the male labour force employed in the building and transport industries, where the work was casual and/or seasonal, and the large proportion of women workers employed in the factory-based industries, were clearly of crucial importance. The trade union structure tended towards extreme diversity, with large numbers of often very small societies staking their claims to represent a portion of the work-force.

Some were locally based, as for example the Coopers' Society, but most were branches of national societies. Some restricted their organisational efforts to one particular industry, whilst others inevitably spread over from the original membership base into related trades.

For the purposes of our analysis it is useful to divide unions into 'closed' and 'open' types, according to their recruitment policies and distinctive modes of operation.[1] Bristol's diverse industrial structure was peculiarly well suited to the growth within it of 'open', general unions, which, theoretically at least, placed no restrictions on eligibility for membership, but sought instead to recruit as large a membership as possible; in collective bargaining, strength in numbers was at a premium. But in 1910, these unions, such as the Dockers' and the Gasworkers', and also the Workers', Unions contained only a minority of total union membership in the city, and it is to the closed unions that we must turn first.

Those unions which restricted their organisational efforts to one particular industry, such as N.U.B.S.O., operated one form of 'closed' recruitment policy. But the term 'closed' unions more properly refers to the societies of skilled craftsmen, such as the A.S.E. and the A.S.C.J., which traditionally barred all but apprenticed craftsmen from membership. Only the well-paid labour aristocrats could afford to pay the relatively high contribution demanded by these societies, but, in return, they were rewarded with relatively high and wide ranging financial benefits which tended to bind them more closely to the union. The membership of the skilled societies was, on the whole, more stable than that of the 'open'

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1. For a discussion of categorization of unions into 'open' and 'closed' types, see H.A. Turner, op.cit., Ch. III.

general unions. But these societies had little intrinsic interest in increasing their numbers, for their strength lay in their ability to control the supply of labour through the apprenticeship system, and through the use of their benefit system. Their mode of operation was that of 'autonomous regulation' of wages, rather than collective bargaining, and a restricted membership was, therefore, of vital importance to these societies.

Detailed membership figures are only available for a small number of unions, but these cover a fair range of industries. Table I below shows the membership of selected 'closed' unions for the period 1911-1925.

TABLE I

BRISTOL MEMBERSHIP OF SELECTED 'CLOSED' UNIONS, 1911-1925

UNION	YEAR							
	1911	1913	1915	1917	1919	1921	1923	1925
A.S.E./A.E.U.[1]	813	1095	1568	2126	3159	3924	2329	2184
A.S.C.J./A.S.W.[2]	651	791	1060	1406	1612	1750	1799	1870
N.A.F.T.A.[3]	295	444	368	595	741	626	500	480
N.U.B.S.O.[4]	1554	1268	2962	4151	5336	3803	2848	2918

The association between trade union membership and the cyclical fluctuation in economic activity is evident from this table. The figures for the unions referred to above show that before 1914 there was a general revival in trade unionism, even in those sections that

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1. A.S.E./A.E.U., Monthly Reports, passim; Figures are taken from the December issue of each journal.
2. A.S.C.J./A.S.W., Monthly Reports, passim.
3. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Reports, passim.
4. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Reports, passim.

were not immediately involved in the struggles of those years, although N.U.B.S.O.'s experience was one of slight decline. The war period brought relatively full employment and an enhanced bargaining power, and this situation continued into the post-war boom period; union membership made enormous strides, reaching a peak in 1920-1921. Thereafter, in most industries, membership declined as unemployment rose and the employers began to launch their counter-offensive. The A.S.W., however, continued to grow after 1920. This was partly due to the A.S.C.J.'s amalgamation with smaller unions, and also partly because at that time it still possessed a substantial membership in the aircraft industry, which was relatively sheltered from economic depression. Both these factors were also true of the A.E.U., yet that union lost members after 1921, which may have been due to its catastrophic defeat during the 1922 engineering lock-out.

Given the recruitment policies of these unions, cyclical trends in economic activity were among the major determinants of their membership trends. But the extent to which they were able to maintain a rigid exclusivity was also important. The processes of technical change, which tended to render old skills obsolete, undermined the position of the aristocracy of labour. The building industry felt the effects of such trends less than did engineering, which, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the introduction of new machinery and techniques which reduced the skilled content in the production process. The problem of what attitude to adopt towards the growing army of semi-skilled and unskilled who were directly involved in production was one which exercised the minds of a growing number of skilled trade unionists at this time. The problem became particularly acute during the war when the demands of the state for increased productivity in war-related

industries speeded up the process of technical innovation and 'dilution' of the formerly skilled occupations.

One response was to adopt an even more rigid exclusion, but, particularly during the war, economic and political realities rendered such a policy untenable, although during the war there was evidence in Bristol of considerable hostility towards the 'dilutees' among skilled engineers. Another approach was for the union involved to co-operate with a 'general' union in organising the unskilled, and during the war there were a number of instances of this occurring.[1] Finally, the union could, itself, open up its membership to the less skilled workers, in order to control their wages and conditions and thus reduce the extent to which the position of the skilled man was undermined. The A.S.E. inaugurated a machinists' section in 1901, in a strictly subordinate and less privileged position within the union.[2] But this rule was made largely inoperative in many areas because of rank and file resistance. The Bristol No. I branch, A.S.E., Minutes for the period 1898-1920, contain only one reference, in 1918, to the problems of machinists. The union remained essentially a body of skilled workers, at least until the creation of the A.E.U. in 1920.

Of some significance was the way in which growth was achieved. In the case of the A.S.E. and the A.S.C.J. it was mainly a matter of the union stepping up its organisational efforts at a time when a growing number of workers in expanding industries were beginning to look to the unions for redress against inflation and falling living standards. These were universal factors in union growth. But it was rarely simply a matter of this. The conditions which obtained in the clothing,

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1. e.g., During the Douglas dispute in May 1915 (see below, p.128 the A.S.E. and the Dockers' Union co-operated in organising the strikers. (Dockers' Record, June 1915).
2. J. B. Jefferys, The Story of the Engineers, 1800-1945, (1945), p.156.

furniture and boot and shoe industries militated against strong trade union organisation - the prevalence of small workshops, the sweated conditions, the existence of large numbers of outworkers, and highly competitive employers who were engaging in undercutting, contributed to a situation where the Bristol branches of these trades were known as blackspots among unions and managements alike.[1] Thus in 1906 the Master Tailors of London complained of their trade being undercut by the low-wage sweat shops of Bristol and Leeds. Organising efforts were made by the London Society of Tailors and Tailoresses and by the Tailors and Garment Workers Union, but membership in this trade remained weak in Bristol.[2]

Yet even among this group of unions, represented in our table by N.A.F.T.A. and N.U.B.S.O., wartime brought better fortunes. The membership of the former was beginning to revive in 1910 and continued to do so before 1914. During the war the growth of the aircraft industry provided the union with unprecedented recruiting opportunities, but it encountered considerable resistance from the employers, both locally and in the shape of the National Federation of Furniture Manufacturers. In January 1916 the union embarked on a strike for higher wages, but was hampered by weak organisation, yet nevertheless it lasted almost six months before N.A.F.T.A. conceded defeat.[3] The furniture manufacturers were well organised and supported the resistance of the Bristol manufacturers financially, for in that industry the existence of a low-wage centre was valuable to the whole Federation in its negotiations with the unions.

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1. e.g., N.U.B.S.O. and N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Reports.
2. Clegg, Fox and Thompson, op.cit., p.442.
3. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Reports, January-June 1916, passim.

In the boot and shoe industry, the employers took the opposite view. The weakness of the union in the Kingswood district particularly was a threat to the competitive position of manufacturers in the better organised centres of the Midlands, since it entailed low wages and price undercutting. It was not until 1891 that N.U.B.S.O. had established a presence in Kingswood, although it had had a branch in Bristol much earlier, and Bristol was never such a problem as Kingswood. The branch there had been wound up in 1897 after the union's defeat in the 1895 national lock-out, and was not reopened until 1909.[1] There were two main factors militating against union organisation. Firstly, the fluctuations of the trade cycle hit the Kingswood trade with particular force since it produced mainly the heavy boot for the South Wales miners, whose own industry was subject to violent cyclical fluctuations. Coal strikes, too, dealt the Kingswood trade a severe blow, resulting in heavy unemployment in the district.[2] 1911 and 1912 were bad years in Kingswood, and this may have affected attitudes of boot workers towards trades unionism. There was also the problem of the outworker, a reflection of the appalling backwardness of the Kingswood trade, and a barrier to trades union organisation.

The onset of war, however, opened the doors to substantial union advances. In October 1914 orders for army boots from the British and French armies were placed in the district, and throughout the war period the boot and shoe factories of the area were working at full capacity.[3] Moreover, the normal competitive pressures were removed, since prices and markets were guaranteed and wages were governed by the Fair Wages Clause. This was a situation which the union could exploit. It was greatly strengthened by the 1914 National Agreement under which, for the first

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1. A. Fox, History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957, (Oxford 1958), p.317.
2. Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1911.
3. Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1915.

time, the Manufacturers' Federation formally recognised the desirability of all workers joining the union in return for a union pledge to enforce the new wage minima on non-federated districts like Kingswood.[1] The following months and years witnessed considerable union activity in the district, with national organisers paying frequent visits, and by consistent and sustained pressure on recalcitrant employers, often involving the use of the strike weapon, the union's organisation in the district was improved.[2] In June 1916 when the union held its biennial delegate conference in Bristol, speakers complimented Kingswood on the progress it had made.[3] But the significant fact about the union's uncharacteristic displays of militancy in Kingswood, and to a lesser extent in Bristol, was that it had the blessing of the employers' federation nationally in adopting such tactics, and of those few federated employers locally who were associated with N.U.B.S.O. through the Bristol and Kingswood boot trade arbitration boards. Militancy was a means of strengthening the processes of conciliation and arbitration by securing the adherence of a larger proportion of employers to the decisions of the Board.

During the war the union increased its membership in other ways. Originally it had been a union of rivetters and fitters, but gradually it had extended its recruitment to other sections of the trade. An effort was now made to bring into membership those workers in the surrounding villages, particularly in North Somerset, and in towns further afield such as Cheltenham and Gloucester. In these latter places it was particularly the boot repairers who were courted by the union. The enormous increases in membership in N.U.B.S.O. in the three Bristol and Kingswood branches, therefore, includes an indeterminate number who

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1. A. Fox, op.cit., pp.341-358.
2. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Reports, passim.
3. W.D.P., 21 June 1916.

lived outside the city. It also included an increasing number of women, who were recruited into membership for the first time. The wartime shortage of labour led to demands from the Government and employers for employment of women workers, and the union agreed on certain conditions; namely, that certain jobs were reserved exclusively for male workers, that women should be paid equal pay for equal work, and that the union should be consulted before any women were introduced.[1] N.U.B.S.O. was thus faced with the problem of what attitude to adopt towards women in its recruiting policy, and the Executive's solution was that they should be admitted into a special membership section which could easily be closed down after the war had ended. In Kingswood, however, in defiance of official policy, the members decided to admit women into full membership of the union. The branch secretary argued that women constituted no greater danger by being members, and it was easier to exercise control over their wages if they were in membership.[2] Within N.U.B.S.O., therefore, dilutees were treated with less hostility than in the A.S.E. and women quickly began to take an active part in the union, serving as shop stewards in their particular areas of the factories.

By the end of the war union membership and the degree of union organisation had substantially improved in all industries, but especially in those areas where it had been traditionally weak. But the collapse of the post-war boom and the coming of mass unemployment totally transformed the situation and thrust many unions back to their pre-war position. The boot and shoe trade was particularly badly hit by the combined effects of depression and a trend away from heavier toward lighter types of footwear. In 1926 the minutes of the Number 2 branch record the fear that the district was 'drifting back to the old standard

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1. N.U.B.S.O., Kingswood Branch, Mins., September 1915.
2. N.U.B.S.O., Bristol and Kingswood No. 2 Branch, Mins., May 1917.

of low wages and bad conditions.'[1] Constant vigilance and frequent visits by national officials could not stop the decline, and with the union weakened many employers abandoned the federation in order no longer to be bound by national agreements on wages and conditions.

The changes that had occurred in N.U.B.S.O.'s recruiting policy reflected its attempt to transform itself from a relatively closed craft society into a relatively less closed industrial union. In other industries there was a similar trend towards industrial unionism at this time. On the Railways the formation of the N.U.R. in 1913 was an example of this, but a true industrial union for the railways was blocked by the craft exclusiveness of A.S.L.E.F. N.A.F.T.A. aspired to be an industrial union for the woodworking trade, but again there were too many competing societies to make this a practicable proposition. But if the competition was intense between unions within one industry, how much more intense was it between the 'open', general unions which aspired to represent any workers who were not already catered for by existing 'closed' societies, and even some that were. There were numerous industries where the unskilled and semi-skilled production workers were unorganised and thus potential recruits to the general unions. And Bristol was a happy hunting ground, par excellence, for the general unions, since its industrial structure was peculiarly well suited to their recruitment policies.

After 1910 general unions everywhere grew from their relatively minor position within the overall trade union picture to occupy first place in 1918.[2] Within the general union group there were differences in size, as shown by Table II.

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1. N.U.B.S.O., Bristol and Kingswood No. 2 Branch, Mins., March 1926.
2. G.D.H. Cole, Trade Unionism and Munitions (Oxford 1923), p.197; In 1914 the General Union group totalled 400,000 members, out of overall union membership of 3,959,000. Engineering numbered 557,000. In 1918 the General Union group had increased to 1,205,000 and Engineering to 951,000, out of a total of 6,664,000.

TABLE II

NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP OF SELECTED 'OPEN' UNIONS, 1810-1920[1]

(in 000s)

Union	1910	1912	1914	1916	1918	1920
D.W.R. & G.W.U.	18	40	47	45	80	133
G. & G.L.U.	32	82	110	152	256	450
N.A.U.L.	16	50	55	85	143	170
W.U.	5	22	159	197	379	500

The figures show that, of the main unions operating in Bristol at this time, the Dockers' Union nationally fell behind its competitors. In Bristol the position was almost completely reversed, as shown by Table III. It is not possible to obtain accurate membership figures for the Bristol districts of these unions, but we can compare the incomes of the Dockers', the Gasworkers', and the Workers' Union. The N.A.U.L., which was mainly northern based, had no presence in Bristol.

TABLE III

ANNUAL INCOME OF BRISTOL DISTRICT, SELECTED 'OPEN' UNIONS

(in £s)

Union	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
D.W.R.[2] & G.W.U.	1670	3704	3374	3374	3723	5535	7077	10966	17537	27791
G. & G.U.L.[3]	116	275	350	560	630	590	620	1700	3000	3750
W.U.[4]	78	64	114	122	199	124	181	n.a.	1111	1924

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1. Cole., op.cit., pp.24; 199.
2. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Annual Reports, passim.
3. G. & G.L.U./N.U.G.W., Quarterly Reports, passim.
4. W.U., Annual Reports, passim.
   Differences in the accounting methods of the three unions require us to exercise caution in comparing the figures. The figures showing Annual income for the Dockers' and Gasworkers' unions in the Bristol District were probably a fairly accurate reflection of their fortunes there. Those for the W.U., however, particularly in the early years, contained a small element of subsidy from the union's Head Office to help it establish a presence in Bristol. It must also be noted that the figures for all unions included both regular subscriptions from members and entrance fees from new members, and this raises difficulties in comparing one year with another. A high income in one year might reflect a union's success in recruiting, whilst a lower income in the following year would not necessarily mean a loss of members - it could simply mean that it had failed to recruit as many new members in that year.

In Bristol the Dockers were more successful than their rivals. This was particularly significant since Bevin's home base within the T.G.W.U. after 1921 was Bristol and the South West, and his experiences in Bristol were very important in helping to mould his concept of the amalgamation. Indeed, he told a T.G.W.U. gathering in Bristol in 1921 that Bristol was largely responsible for the amalgamation for they had worked hard locally to build one large union of dockers, transport workers and general factory workers.[1] As a union the T.G.W.U. locally reflected the diverse industrial structure, and seemed particularly well suited to the specific local conditions. But we cannot assume any inevitability in this process.

From the vantage point of 1910 it was by no means sure that the Dockers' Union would outstrip its rivals. Indeed, as seen above, there was very little rivalry between it and the Gasworkers', the other main general union with a presence in Bristol. Even in 1889 the Dockers had been exclusively concerned with waterfront problems, and was content to allow the Gasworkers a free hand among the numerous factory and workshop trades. Since that time there had grown up a tacit understanding between the officials of the two unions which loosely defined their respective spheres of interest.[2] During the period 1889-1910 it was the Gasworkers who made the most efforts to organise outside their original base group; the tramways strike in 1901 was a case in point. But they met with little success, and by 1910 both were largely confined within small sectional base of membership, with no apparent urge to expand immediately.

Turner has described 'open' unions as almost inevitably expansionist in tendency.[3] This is to imply that such unions can and have expanded

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1. B.T.H., 24 October 1921.
2. W.D.P., 23 April 1910. This understanding was referred to by Thorne and Tillett at recruiting meeting for Corporation workers.
3. H. A. Turner, op.cit., p.242.

merely through the organisational efforts of union officials. The process of expansion of the Dockers' Union in Bristol reveals the fallaciousness of this idea. When that union began to grow from 1909 and 1910 it was responding to certain specific pressures. Firstly, militancy among the union's own rank and file, and also similar feelings among non-unionists, threatened to create a situation on the waterfront beyond the very limited amount of control exercised by the union. From the moment unofficial strikes broke out the union officials were impelled to recruit non-unionists in order to protect their position vis-a-vis the employers. Yet the non-unionists themselves turned to the union officials for help, for in a period when they were beginning to make demands on the employers, there was a need to protect themselves against counter-attack, and to strengthen the union organisation in preparation for future advances. The improvement of the Dockers' Union's organisation on the Bristol and Avonmouth docks dates essentially from the strikes of 1910 and 1911.

Between 1910 and 1914 there was a drive to unionise the whole docks, by bringing in all grades of dock labourer, the permanent staff in the employ of the Docks Committee, and the carters and warehousemen who were engaged in and around the docks. Particular attention was given to the strategically vital groups, such as lock-gate men and crane drivers.[1] The D.R. of March 1911 reported considerable progress: 'The bargemen and lightermen have come along. The carmen are holding together well, and at no distant date the branch will be 1000 strong, ... The warehousemen are also joining the carters' branch, and they are the last link in the chain.

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1. A branch for permanent staff in the employ of the Docks Committee (No. 14 branch) was opened in April 1914: D.R., April 1914.

If the warehousemen come along, as it is expected they will, every section connected with dock and wharf work will be covered by the union.' Tugboat men were also given attention,[1] and by 1914 no important section of waterfront workers remained outside the union.

Yet the evidence suggests that it was rank and file dockers who were in the forefront of this movement. In September 1911, for example, the unionised lock-gate men struck to compel non-unionists to join the union, but they failed to gain official support and the dispute produced no definite settlement.[2] The dockers of the No. 3 branch several times demanded of their officials that they present themselves at the dock gates in the mornings at regular intervals to check members' contribution cards.[3] The regularity with which these demands were made suggests that the officials who perhaps were too bound up in negotiations to be able to devote much time to organising, were rather lax in this respect.

Nevertheless, the Dockers' Union succeeded in building up a position on the Bristol docks unique in waterfront trade unionism at this time, with a virtual monopoly of all grades and all sections, plus transport workers and warehousemen. Elsewhere it was still common before 1914 for several unions to be engaged in competition with one another, and for the strength of all to suffer as a result. In Bristol, as Bevin told the 1913 Annual General Meeting of the N.T.W.F. at Newport, '... it is a consciousness on the part of the employer the whole time that he is negotiating with the coal-trimmer, the docker, carter, or seaman, that they have a combined executive behind them representing the co-operation of their fellows in the same organisation, that gives power to the negotiator. ... Where there is one union covering all the transport,

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1. W.D.P., 11 December 1911.
2. W.D.P., 6 September 1911.
4. e.g., D.W.R. & G.W.U., Bristol No. 3 Branch, Mins., 17 April 1913: 24 September 1914.

and the bulk of the general labourers' unions in the town, what is the first thing the employers ask? It is, 'Will you all strike together?'.[1]

The enormous strides in membership, however, were the result of the union's beginning to take an interest in the general workers of the town. It was in the logic of the nature of dock work that the union should attempt to organise general workers. Only thus could it begin to come to terms with the problems caused by the casual labour system, for dockers' unions were constantly faced with the question of how to control the competition for jobs at the hiring stands, and the consequent chronic under-employment of dock workers. One possible response was the traditional craft exclusiveness adopted by the London stevedores.[2] In Bristol this was not a practicable policy. The Dockers' Union sought to enrol all grades of dock workers, for in Bristol there was a less rigid distinction between stevedores and other groups. Moreover, the port was mainly engaged in import trade, hence ship loading which involved stevedores, was of much less importance than in London.

The problem of casual workers was seen by union officials in terms of a distinction between those who followed dock work all year round, and who suffered chronic under-employment, and the 'once-a-weekers' who were normally employed elsewhere, or not employed at all, and who were not skilled enough for regular dock work, and hence were employed in unloading the banana boats.[3] From the evidence of Bristol officials to the Shaw Enquiry in 1920 it is clear that Bristol dockers did not like unloading banana boats and were content to allow this work to be done by true casuals, particularly workers from the brickyards, another seasonal trade.[4] Carters, too, might be found at the hiring stands

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1. Quoted in Bullock, op.cit., p.40.
2. J. Lovell, Stevedores and Dockers, (1969), ch.2.
3. W.D.P., 29 November 1911. The phrase was Bevin's, as were the sentiments which it expressed.
4. Report of Shaw Enquiry, Cd. 937, (1920).

seeking work when their own trade was depressed. The primary concern of the union was with the earnings and security of employment of its members on the docks; union officials, and Bevin in particular, consistently pressed for decasualisation of dock labour as a solution, but within the scope of the union itself there were possibilities of exercising some control over the competition for jobs by enrolling all those seeking work at the docks, and then issuing 'general' workers with a union ticket different from the dockers' ticket, and at the same time, through the strengthening of organisation on the docks itself, of beginning to exercise a monopoly over dock work, ensuring that those with dockers' tickets were given first preference.

This monopoly had been more or less established by 1914. In November of that year the local Gasworkers union complained to their Executive that the Dockers' would not allow their members to obtain work at the Bristol docks.[1] By 1914 also, the union had begun to recruit the brickyard workers who occasionally sought work at the docks. In 1913 a branch was opened in Cattybrook, and in 1914 at Shortwood, villages where brickyards were situated.[2] These efforts continued and by the end of the war the union exercised an almost total monopoly on the Bristol and Avonmouth docks. So exasperated were the Gasworkers' at being squeezed out that at their Biennial Congress in 1922 the local secretary Hawker moved that the union rename itself the National Union of Transport and General Workers, explaining that although they were affiliated to the N.T.W.F., '... if they had carters or motor drivers at a factory or a private firm where all the other members were in the G.M.W.U., when they occasionally went to Bristol docks it was impossible

1. G. & G.L.U., General Council, Mins., November 1914.
2. D.R., October 1913; April 1914.

for them to get goods unloaded unless the men transferred to the Dockers' Union.'[1]

The expansion into non-dock areas of the labour force can be seen to have been closely related to dock problems. But we must not ignore other factors, such as the institutional imperatives acting on unions of this type. General unions tended to carry a relatively large staff of officials, who had to be supported with regular contributions, which dockers were not always capable of supplying. There was a need then to recruit a membership with relatively more stable employment. The Dockers' Union had always aspired to be a general workers union; indeed this had been central to the claims of Thorne and Tillett to represent a new type of trades unionism. Since 1889 they had been reduced to largely sectional societies, and until the immediate pre-war years the Dockers' remained a mainly waterfront union. But at this time it began to fear the competition of a new rival, the Workers' Union, which made its first appearance on the Bristol scene in 1909.

In that year the members of a small local society of corporation workers, from whom recognition had been withdrawn by the T.U.C., decided to transfer their allegiances to the W.U.[2] The union President was optimistic about the potential in Bristol. 'We are hoping,' he wrote, 'that before long Bristol will be one of our strongest districts, as there are great possibilities for a union like ours in that city and district.' But the W.U.'s intervention threatened to undermine the tacit understanding between the Gasworkers' and Dockers, since the former claimed the exclusive right to organise corporation workers, whilst some of the members of the local society had been employees of the Docks Committee. The two unions closed ranks and blocked the W.U.'s application

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1. N.U.G.W., Biennial Congress Report, 1922.
2. W.U., Annual Report, 1909.

for affiliation to the Trades Council. 'The immediate result,' complained the W.U. organiser, 'was the break up of the branches and the majority of those men we took over became non-unionists.'[1] But the W.U. retained a small membership among permanent dock workmen, and indeed attempted to recruit among the carters. The threat was beaten off by Bevin.[2] The W.U. remained a thorn in the side of the Dockers', and prevented them exercising a total monopoly on the docks, but in the years before 1914 it enjoyed very little success.

Nevertheless, its intervention sparked off a period of competitive trades unionism, quite different from the earlier period of mutual understanding. For, when the W.U. found its way blocked among dockworkers and corporation workers, it turned its attention to the vast mass of unorganised factory workers. In 1910 it opened a Bristol East branch with a base in Lysaght's Galvanising works, and had limited success there before the war.[3] The Dockers, too, were beginning to show signs of interest. The D.R. reports of 1914 tell of active propaganda in the oil milling, flour milling and galvanising trades, which met with little initial response.[4]

The war created a new situation for the union organiser, and it was in the period 1914 to 1919 that the unions registered their biggest gains. Rapid wartime inflation posed a threat to living standards that trade unionists were demonstrably best placed to resist. The success of the Dockers' Union in winning war bonuses - it won seven increases in wages during the war, which doubled the day rate - was a particularly persuasive

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1. W.U., Annual Report, 1910.
2. D.R., September 1912: A. Bullock, op.cit., p.22.
3. W.U., Annual Report, 1910.
4. D.R., April, August 1914.

advertisement for the benefits of trade unionism.[1] The Dockers were to the fore in the growing mood of militancy, as witnessed by their leadership of rent strikes in 1915[2] and their agitation for food control in 1917.[3] Moreover, the relatively full employment of the war economy enhanced the unions' bargaining power, whilst the nexus of Government regulations and the increasing intervention of the state in the affairs of individual firms made it much more difficult for employers to refuse recognition.

The gains were not immediate, and 1915 was little better for the union organiser than 1914 had been. It was in 1916 and after that the real advances were made. The Dockers' opened their Bristol East branch, also based on Lysaghts, and with a membership in other local chemical works.[4] In 1916, too, corporation workers were recruited, thus announcing the demise of the understanding with the Gasworkers.[5] During the last two years of the war the Dockers were on an ascending slope of growth. 'There seems to be a wave amongst the unorganised workers to join our union' wrote the District Secretary in November 1917.[6] Branches were opened in the confectionery and chocolate, tobacco, aircraft, and waggon-building industries. A Bristol South branch was based on the leadworks. Membership in the flour mills and warehouses was strengthened, and branches were opened in the surrounding villages.[7] The figures in Table III are a fair reflection of the Dockers' Union's growth in 1917 and after.

The W.U. attempted to recruit in the same areas, but with rather less success.[8] In 1910, for example, both had two tobacco branches,

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1. D.R., passim; G. A. Phillips, op.cit., p.255.
2. W.D.P., 15 November 1915; D.R., November 1915.
3. See below pp.
4. D.R., April 1916.
5. D.R., September 1916.
6. D.R., November 1917.
7. D.R., 1916/1917, passim.
8. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Annual Report, 1918.

but the combined income of the W.U. branches was less than £600, whilst that of the Dockers' was £1600. The Dockers' also enjoyed considerable success among the corporation workers, whilst the Gasworkers' were confined to areas with considerably less potential - food factories, the waterworks, builders' labourers, tannery workers and malleable casters.[1] Women workers were a significant proportion of the new recruits, and both the W.U. and the Dockers' employed full-time women organisers to recruit women. Thus the Dockers' grew from an estimated 8000 in Bristol in 1911 to an estimated 40,000 in 1921.[2]

Turner has described the pattern of trade union growth thus: '... open, expansionist unions have spread around islands of stable closed unionism. ... The principle animating the apparently haphazard growth of British unions has therefore been the elementary one that nature abhors a vacuum. Organisational vacuums have generally been filled by the nearest union to hand that was under pressure to expand.'[3] In part this is a fair description of the process of growth in Bristol. But we must not overstress the haphazardness of it, for it can be demonstrated that the expansion of the Dockers' Union followed logical lines of development. The first non-dockers who were recruited were groups who had close links with the port; first the carters, then the warehousemen, and this gave the union the chance to expand outside the dock area since there were large numbers of workers doing similar work away from the docks. The brick workers were next, and they were often to be found seeking dock work at the calling-on stands. Many of the factory-based industries of the city were connected with the port either through the import of raw

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1. G. & G.L.U./N.U.G.W., Quarterly Reports, passim.
2. D.R., December 1911; B.T.N., 24 October 1921.
3. H.A. Turner, op.cit., Ch. V.

material or through the export of finished articles, and clear links can be established between unionised transport workers and the factories they served. The carters were important here, but so too were the bargemen who, for example, carried chemicals from the docks to the chemical works clustered around the Avon in East Bristol - the Butler's tar and resin works, and the Netham Alkali works.[1] Direct links with factories such as these gave the Dockers' a clear competitive advantage over its rivals, and it was that union which succeeded in recruiting workers there.

From the point of view of bargaining power there were clear advantages for the members in the factories to be linked to transport workers in the same union. Once started, the movement developed a momentum of its own and the union began to attract recruits from areas which had no direct links with the docks. But as the union began to take shape as an alliance of the transport and general workers, and as the officials began consciously to pursue a policy of building such an alliance, the dock and transport workers were seen as the central elements in the union. In the D.R. officials started to talk in terms of the potential opened up by their own recruiting success. Tobacco was used as an example to illustrate it. 'The tobacco arrives by ships and is handled by members of the T.G.W.U. working in the hold of the ship. Men working ashore are the first persons to handle the goods when arriving at the port. Secondly it is conveyed from the dock side to tobacco warehouse by steam and motor wagons, the drivers of which are also our members. The tobacco has to be moved from warehouse to factory, still by members of the union. Our members also take part in the manufacture. Therefore, the workers, in the event of any attempt by the employers to do injustice

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1. S. Liveing, op.cit.

to the factory workers, they could if necessary have support from the whole of the other sections (sic). This huge machine will be a powerful weapon in the negotiations with the employers to obtain justice.'[1]

There were other advantages attached to membership of the Dockers'. The union's assertion of a closed shop policy on the docks closed the casual occupations to all but union members. Even before 1914 a system of different union tickets had been introduced at Bristol to control the competition for jobs. Thus Bevin told the Newport meeting in 1913 that 'In the port of Bristol theirs was the only union; they had all kinds of men in all classes of work, yet there was no trouble about lines of demarcation, and transfers worked quite smoothly, through a departmental system with different officers for each section. If it could be done locally, it could be done nationally.'[2] After the war when there was again a situation of too much labour chasing too little work, the docks were in danger of reverting to the primitive evils of the casual system.

There had been some move towards registration of dock workers during the war, and this became the basis of the union's closed shop.[3] But the banana boats remained a casual occupation. One liner a week called at Avonmouth, and as the work required no special skill, there was a scramble among casual workers for jobs. The union had managed to force the employers to concede that men engaged on banana boats were paid a minimum of two day's wages, and through its control over the hiring procedures was able to ensure that only men holding the general workers' union ticket could get work.[4] Reports in the D.R. suggest that it was mainly the warehousemen who benefited from this arrangement, but others also gained. In February 1920 it reported that 'we are endeavouring to make up the deficiency (in labour for the banana boats) from our own members in the

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1. T.G.W.U., Record, August 1921.
2. J. Lovell, op.cit., p.21[illegible].
3. See below, p.
4. T.G.W.U., Record, May 1922.

general workers' section who have been dismissed from various factories because of men returning from the colours. The average number is 250 per week, and special permits are given to the men through the union. The system of issuing tallies keeps the men entirely under the control of the organisation and avoids having hundreds of men fighting at the dock gates for employment.'[1] This arrangement could only survive, however, as long as registered dockers were able to find adequate employment; when trade slumped, the general workers were squeezed out by the dockers' claim to first call on the available employment.

The splitting of the membership into transport and general workers' sections was the basis of the union which emerged out of the amalgamation of 1921, with its flexible trade group structure. The Dockers' Union had been moving towards the trade structure before 1914, when the Tinplate district in South Wales was converted into a separate trade group.[2] In Bristol the system emerged gradually. Until 1916 all general workers were recruited initially into the carters' and warehouse-men's branches, for the members of these were very often the recruiting agents. But such a method could not cope with the vast influx experienced in the latter years of the war, and separate branches began to appear. Some were area based, as in the East and the South; the former had its own full-time official and its own office in the district.[3] Others were factory based, as at Fry's and Wills. About this time reports in the D.R. refer to separate sections for transport and for general workers, and there were references, too, to the sections having their own district committees.[4] Well before the amalgamation the rudiments of the trade group structure had been established in Bristol.

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1. D.R., February 1920.
2. E. J. Hobsbawm, 'General Labour Unions 1889-1914', in Labouring Men, (1964), p.193.
3. D.R., August 1917.
4. D.R., November 1916.

The concept seems to have been very much Bevin's idea. A number of factors in his career distinguished him from his contemporaries among union officials, apart from his undoubted organisational ability. Firstly, he started his working life not as a docker but as a carter, and indeed, it was largely Bevin's efforts initially that led to the formation of the carters' branch of the Dockers' Union. Moreover, he was a recruit of the 1910 period, when the union, under pressure from its own rank and file, was beginning to emerge from the 'defensive siege' mentality that had prevailed since the mid-1890's. Bevin was not afflicted by that experience, and was thus well placed to respond to the changes that occurred in the next few years. Nor was he a docker, and this allowed him to take a wider view of the union's possibilities than those officials who had grown up in the period before 1910 when it had been exclusively a dockers' union.

Yet it was in addressing himself primarily to the problems of the docks that Bevin and the union officials in Bristol developed the idea of the trade group structure. For even though they were recruiting outside the original base group of the union, the dockers' problems occupied pride of place in union thinking. This was a reflection of the very special position the dockers, as the original base group, had within the union; their solidarity, their militancy, and their bargaining power gave them a certain status. Their capacity for undertaking unofficial action gave them a self-reliance and an independence of the union officials, and constantly threatened the officials' attempts to reach an accommodation with the employers. This affected the way dockers related to the whole labour movement, for whilst on the one hand there was a tendency towards insularity and belittling of political action arising out of their feelings of self-reliance, on the other hand they enjoyed a certain status within the movement which was quite independent of their membership of the union. The factory worker members, however,

related both to their officials and to the Labour movement in a completely different way. They had been brought into union membership largely through the efforts of union recruitment drives; in only a few isolated instances had it been necessary to engage in a recognition strike, in contrast to the dockers' experiences. This was a reflection of the much less acute conflicts which were experienced in these factories than were common on the docks, and conditions such as these tended to produce a more conservative, more passive workforce, whose attachment to the union, and thus to the Labour movement tended to be less permanent. Moreover, because of the way in which they were brought into union membership their relationship to the union and the movement tended to be much more one of dependence on the officials, and this was a two-way process, for, as it later became apparent, these largely passive members came to serve as a base for the policies of their officials within the wider labour movement which the dockers, because of their independence, could not provide.

The decline in membership, consequent upon the slump in trade, was felt most severely by the general unions. The T.G.W.U., which in 1921 was claiming 40,000 members had shrunk to less than 12,000 in 1928.[1] The W.U. also lost heavily, although the N.U.G.M.W., successor to the Gasworkers', seems to have derived some stability from its bases among the gasworkers and corporation workers. The income of the W.U. fell from a peak of £7625 in 1921 to £1725 in 1926, and it seems to have suffered more than its rivals because it had no solid original base group on which to fall back.[2] For the greatest losses were recorded amongst the new recruits in the factories, particularly amongst women workers. The tobacco and confectionary women's branches of the T.G.W.U. both declined

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1. T.G.W.U., Annual Report, 1928.
2. W.U., Annual Reports, passim; The N.U.G.M.W. which in 1920 had an income locally of £4500, had only fallen to £3700 in 1926; N.U.G.M.W., Quarterly Reports, passim.

drastically; the former, which had had 2898 members in 1922 had fallen to 425 in 1928.[1] Among the dockers membership was fairly stable, registering only a slight decline. This is another illustration of the different relationship to the unions on the part of different groups of workers. Yet in only a very few areas were the unions eradicated altogether. On the tramways union organisation was smashed in 1923 after an unofficial strike,[2] but elsewhere, in those areas where union membership was of recent origin, some semblance of organisation was preserved, and the unions continued to negotiate with employers. They were not pushed back to the pre-war position.

Collective Bargaining

Writing in the B.T.M. in 1922 a local commentator on industrial affairs commented that in Bristol, '... embittered industrial relations are, by the diversity of interests and trades, somewhat softened. Prolonged and bitter strikes were comparatively unknown until the national movements of later years developed.'[3] The tendency to blame conflicts on outside influences was a recurring feature of press reportage at this time, a reflection of the complacency with which the local middle and upper classes approached 'the social problem.' This complacency was severely shaken by the events of the period 1910-1926, when open class conflict frequently broke through to the surface, undermining attempts at accommodation between Capital and Labour. The position of the official union structures in relation to these events is the theme of this section. It has not been possible, nor would it necessarily be useful, to survey

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1. T.G.W.U., Annual Reports, passim.
2. W.D.P., 5 June - 11 June 1923; B.T.M., ibid.
3. A. J. Pugsley, 'The Economic Development of Bristol', in B.T.M., June-Aug. 1924.

the whole field of collective bargaining and union-employer relationships; selection has been based partly on the availability of sources, and partly on the relative importance of certain industries and certain unions within the local industrial structure. The docks, the mines and the boot and shoe industry have been singled out for special comment.

a) The Docks

The dock strikes of 1911 resulted in surprisingly modest gains for the dockers. The wage advances won were significantly less than had been demanded, and the union failed in its attempt to establish a closed-shop by agreement with the employers. But in terms of collective bargaining the main outcome of these strikes was the strengthening of the established trends towards the settling of disputes by conciliation and arbitration, and towards the joint regulation of working practices by union and employer. In recent theoretical works Flanders has argued that a union's stability depends on the extent to which it has entered into the regulatory process: 'To secure a permanent membership the trade unions have to render a constant service to their members. This is made possible by their participation in job regulation, and the deeper and more extensive that participation, the greater the service they can offer.'[1] The Dockers' Union had involved itself in job regulation relatively early in its career. The Webbs, in their study of Industrial Democracy argued that it '... is in the piecework trades ... that we find the machinery for collective bargaining in its most highly developed form',[2] and we can find examples of this on the Bristol docks. The main piece work trade was the unloading of grain, and it was perhaps no accident that the grain porters were the most stable section of union membership in the period 1893-1910, for the union was required to render

1. A. Flanders, 'Collective Bargaining: A Theoretical Analysis', in British Journal of Industrial Relations, (1968), p.26.
2. S. & B. Webb, Industrial Democracy (1902), p.182.

a constant service in fixing rates. The earnings capacity of grainporters depended on the number of men in each gang, the type of ship, whether the men were working in the hold, on deck, or on shore, and whether the work was done by hand or with the aid of mechanical elevators, which were being introduced at the beginning of our period. Special rates had to be negotiated to cover all these contingencies, and the complexities of the wages system left ample room for dispute, thus calling for a continuous service to the men from their negotiators.[1]

Timeworkers, too, faced similar problems. Deal runners, for example, benefitted from negotiated regulations which stipulated the load each man was required to carry, varying according to the type of wood and the size of each plank, and the regulation which laid down that the 'run is not to exceed 50 yards, without horsing.'[2] General cargo workers, also on time rates, were required to work many different cargoes, each with its own peculiar handling characteristics. Extra money for noxious cargoes was set out in the agreements covering these workers. Manning levels were crucial not only to the pieceworkers, for they affected also the amount of work each man was required to do, the safety of the operation, and the general availability of employment. Some manning levels had long been settled by custom, but from 1911 it became more common for them to be clearly set out in agreements.

Regulation of the job thus followed inevitably from the attempt to control earnings and safeguard employment. But it also stemmed from the union's desire to soften some of the evils of the casual system, particularly the dockers' dependence on chance and on the arbitrary will of others. The principle of a minimum payment for any man started on a

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1. Throughout this dissertation, when quoting from Docks agreements I have used copies of the originals which have been kept in the Bristol District Office of the T.G.W.U. Subsequently referred to as 'D.W.R. & G.W.U., Agreements'.
2. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Agreements, Deal Runners, n.d.

job was established for grain porters, general cargo workers and lightermen before 1910.[1] In 1911 the rates were raised and the principle was extended to include deal runners.[2] Weather was an unpredictable factor that could play havoc with earnings, and one of the most important gains of 1911 was that general cargo workers who were 'ordered to stand by through stress of weather' were to be paid half-rates.[3] Deal runners did not win this concession until 1914.[4]

Flanders has concluded that the 'value of a union to its members lies less in its economic achievements than in its capacity to protect their dignity.'[5] Tillett's frequently voiced aim was to raise the status and dignity of his members. Thus, while the intention behind the regulations referred to was partly economic, there was also the underlying aim of defining the dockers' rights, 'and consequently their status and security, and so liberate them from dependence on the arbitrary will of others.'[6] By entering into joint regulation the union was doing much to soften the effects of the casual system and to raise the dignity of its own members, but this aim was by no means achieved in 1911, nor could it be until, at the very least, the casual system was abolished.

For the employers, collective bargaining as a rule-making process brought positive advantages, for it had the effect of removing some of the fundamental conflict of interest from the workplace to the negotiating table, and, by reducing deep-felt grievances and aspirations to a set of clearly formulated demands, rendered them capable of solution by compromise. Conflict became institutionalised, channelled into established

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1. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Agreements, n.d.
2. ibid., 1911.
3. ibid., 1911.
4. ibid., 1914.
5. A. Flanders, op.cit., p.26.
6. Ibid.

modes of behaviour to which both union and management alike were committed. Provisions for the hearing of grievances and for the settling of disputes over the interpretation of agreements were essential corollaries to collective bargaining, and as bargaining developed, so the machinery became more elaborate. Early agreements merely contained the clause: 'Should any dispute arise in connection with any work not mentioned in these rules and rates, it shall be settled amicably between the employers and their employees or their representatives.'[1] In 1900 a Conciliation Board was set up for the grain trade, and the union agreed to deposit £300 with the Board as a guarantee against breaking agreements. Similar 'caution money' agreements were reached for the timber trade and with the Dock Committee, £200 and £500 being deposited respectively.[2] But neither conciliation nor the threat of financial penalties on the union deterred dockers from their actions in 1910 and 1911. Indeed, insofar as conciliation resulted in delays in settling disputes and frustrations, they may well have contributed to the explosion. Yet the lesson the union drew from the strikes was that there was a need for more flexible and more efficient machinery. Hence, for the general cargo section a Permanent Joint Committee was established, with five representatives of the shipowners and five of the union, and the union undertook not to call a stoppage over any matter in dispute, pending a decision of the J-C., which was to meet within one week.[3] For the grain section it was agreed that disputes should be referred to arbitration.[4] Other sections, such as the coal porters, however, still had no regular joint union-management machinery in 1914, and communication was by way of the foreman.[5]

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1. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Agreements, n.d.
2. P. Lang, op.cit.
3. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Agreements, 1911.
4. ibid., 1911.
5. ibid., 1914.

Despite the gaps in the provisions for avoiding disputes, the agreements of 1911 showed that the union officials' commitment to the processes of conciliation and arbitration was strengthened rather than weakened by the events of that year. The paradox was that the outcome of a situation of open class conflict was a further institutionalisation of that conflict, for, once the officials regained control over events, their predilection for this more manageable way of conducting industrial relations asserted itself. Yet commitment to the processes of conciliation and arbitration was not the same as an acceptance of the ideology of industrial peace and class collaboration, which was operative at a political level. Writing in his Annual Report for 1913 Tillett argued that while conciliation and arbitration were no cures or remedies, 'or even a means of establishing a permanent peace with the employers, they at least prevent unnecessary friction, and withal, in many cases, act as a check on unscrupulous employers.' But Tillett was not blind to the advantages for the employers: 'Without being cynical,' he wrote, 'I say that understanding is always to the advantage of the employers even more than the workers.'[1]

This was indeed the case. The signing of an agreement tied down the union officials even more than it did the employers, since there were vast areas of managerial control not subject to joint regulation. Moreover, the agreements imposed certain responsibilities on the officials, who were acutely conscious that in future negotiations their ability to honour their side of the bargain would be a crucial factor in the employers' calculations. Such pressures upon union officials brought them into conflict with the spontaneous feelings of their own members,

1. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Annual Report, 1913.

particularly in a situation of sympathetic strike action. In June 1912, the N.T.W.F. called a national stoppage in support of the London dock strike.[1] Bristol was one of the few ports to respond, but the dockers, carters, warehousemen and permanent hands who stopped work were in breach of their agreements. The local officials were clearly uncomfortable about the position they found themselves in, and after three days, when Bevin had failed to persuade the members in South Wales to join the strike, the stoppage was brought to an end in Bristol.[2] Local agreements were in danger, and some employers had taken out summonses against 200 carters for breach of contract, and were demanding that their employees leave the union. The officials were thus concerned to protect the position they had built up in Bristol rather than to express solidarity with the London strikers, and whilst there was some resistance to the return to work on the part of some dockers, the will of their officials prevailed.

It was not only sympathetic strikes, but any unofficial actions on the part of union members that the officials were increasingly obliged to prevent. Although they performed this task inefficiently, as shown by the number of stoppages which occurred, there is little doubt that they regarded it seriously. The local reports in the D.R. frequently took up the need for discipline: 'We desire to call the attention of the members to the necessity of abiding by agreements existing between themselves and the employers, and when grievances arise to continue at work until such time as one of the officials can open up negotiations with the representatives of the boards that have been created to deal with the matters of dispute. The continual stoppages that occur over trivial disputes are not to the best interests of the organisation or the membership.'[3] But the appeals seem to have fallen on deaf ears.

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1. G. A. Phillips, op.cit., p.143.
2. W.D.P., 11-13 June 1912; B.T.H., ibid.
3. D.R., September 1912.

They frequently recurred, and the District Secretary was so exasperated by a rash of stoppages in 1917 that he was moved to write: 'We regret the men took this attitude; it is not cricket. ... The position is intolerable.'[1]

The officials did not see their policing role as relating only to the observance of agreements, for they were acutely aware of the bad reputation of dockers, and the effect this might have on the image of the union. The strictures of local officials on the strikers in 1910, and many of Bevin's speeches, show that these officials accepted many of the prevailing assumptions about the behaviour of their members, and accepted that the union had a role to elevate it. This aim runs through much of Tillett's conception of trade unionism. It involved the union in taking on a responsibility for discipline. An early local agreement stated that: 'Any man who leaves his job before finishing it for the purpose of getting another, or who shall be found guilty of using abusive language towards the employers or their foremen, or any officer of his union, shall be brought before his branch committee, who shall reprimand him or fine him; if the offence is of a very serious nature, he shall be brought before his district committee, who shall be empowered to fine him or expel him from the union.'[2] In this way the union came to act as a buffer between its members and their employers, and Tillett displayed a very acute understanding of this role. In 1916 he was trying to launch a scheme of co-operative housing development for dockers in Bristol, and was forced to apply to the Public Works Loan Board for assistance. He argued his case thus: 'May I claim without any sort of apology that this organisation has successfully maintained continuity of employment second

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1. D.R., June 1917.
2. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Agreements, n.d.

to none if not superior to any other industry in the country. We have enforced discipline, and have at all times been faithful to our trust. We hope that having justified our existence the Government will realise the importance of our request and provide the necessary material assistance.'[1]

In a sense, the taking on of a disciplinary function was an encroachment on managerial prerogatives, and an attempt to soften the arbitrariness of managerial authority. But the frontier of control was not pushed back into the employers' camp to any significant degree by the terms of collective agreements. Indeed, several important areas of decision-making were specifically excluded from joint regulation. The 1911 General Cargo agreement, for example, contained the clauses that: 'No objection to be made to the use of machinery in the discharging or loading of cargoes.' and that: 'The union shall not interfere in any way with the method of working cargo on ship or quay.'[2] Moreover, such penetration as the union succeeded in achieving was severely circumscribed in its effectiveness by the union's acceptance of management ideology, on some levels. An indication of this was provided by the wording of a clause in the 1911 Grain Trade agreement: 'The employers' chief foreman at the respective docks shall have full control in the matter of manipulating the men to suit the requirements of the work, and his authority to be duly recognised by every man working under his orders.'[3]

This manipulation was precisely what the union was attempting to control through joint regulation. The process was at a very under-developed stage, but even in 1911 it was clear that whilst on the one hand the intervention of the union into the field of job regulation could

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1. Ben Tillett to P.W.L.B., 18 May 1916; (Frank Sheppard papers, in Bristol Archives.)
2. D.W.H. & G.W.U., Agreements, 1911.
3. ibid., 1911.

soften some of the arbitrariness of managerial authority, the union officials themselves became trapped in a situation where they were less of a threat to that authority and more of an ally in the business of labour management. Their attempts to decasualise the dock industry followed the same pattern.

Before 1914 there was an increasing awareness on the part of union officials that the problems both they and their members faced were not capable of solution without decasualisation. The chronic under-employment and irregularity of earnings, which affected union stability, and the question of the status of the docker, were products of the casual labour system. So too were the immobility of dock labour, and the rigid demarcation lines which so troubled many employers. But the employers showed little positive interest in decasualisation until relatively late; their vested interest in a system where labour supply exceeded demand was of crucial importance. The question of decasualisation resolved itself into three separate issues; how to eliminate the floating surplus of labour; how to organise the labour force to make it flexible and mobile; and how to provide regularity of earnings. The last, the question of maintenance, which was of most vital concern to the dockers, was hardly any nearer solution in 1939 than it had been in 1914, but considerable progress was made, through union-employer co-operation, on the first two problems.

Early initiatives were taken by the union. Municipal ownership of the docks encouraged the union officials to pursue decasualisation through political means. Sheppard moved a motion at a City Council meeting calling for steps towards decasualisation, but the matter was shelved by referring it to a special committee.[1] The union decided

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1. W.D.P., 29 November 1911.

to apply pressure by conducting a public campaign in association with the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution, and at a public meeting on the subject in November 1911 Bevin shared the platform with members of the Docks Committee and employers.[1] His main demand was that the men who followed dock work regularly should be given first preference of employment, but he stressed that any scheme must have mutual consent, and suggested the formation of a joint board of five bodies - the union, the merchants, the shipowners, the Docks Committee, and the Council Distress Committee - to compile a register of regular dock workers. Relief schemes, he argued, should cope with the genuine casuals.

Indifference on the part of employers prevented any real progress. The only advance made before 1914 was the adoption by the City Council of a resolution supporting the idea of registration in principle.[2] A special committee was set up to draft a scheme, but the outbreak of war interrupted its work. Yet the effect of the war was greatly to accelerate the pace of registration, for, in order to facilitate recruiting whilst at the same time retaining an adequate supply of labour, Port Labour Committees were established in all major ports, with equal representatives of unions and employers. The Bristol P.L.C., established in June 1916, compiled a record of the amount of work done on the docks in a given period by each docker to establish how large was the surplus labour force. The genuine casuals were refused exemption from military service, a privilege extended to those who could prove that they were regular dock workers.[3] In 1917, acting on the suggestion of Bevin, the P.L.C. adopted a scheme for the issue of Port Labour Record of Employment books to all dockers, the possession of which being the

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1. W.D.P., 29 November 1911.
2. W.D.P., 17 February, 19 February, 17 March 1914.
3. Hamilton Whyte, The Decasualisation of Dock Labour, (Bristol 1934), p.35.

condition for obtaining dock work. Moreover, for the first time the union monopoly was formally recognised, for all books (with certain exceptions for those few who were members of the Workers' Union) were to be issued through the Dockers' Union Office. Later alterations to the scheme went even further and stated that all men covered by the agreements were to be members of the Dockers' Union (later the T.G.W.U.).[1]

In a number of ports after the war, registration schemes fell into disuse. In Bristol, however, it survived and indeed, was improved upon. In 1919 a system of metal tallies was introduced as the basis on which dock employment was given, only registered dock workers being issued with the tallies, which were of two kinds, in order to differentiate between regular dockers and carters, warehousemen and permanent loaders who occasionally sought dock work.[2] The scheme thus neatly dovetailed into the union's own efforts to control competition for employment at the calling-on stands. For a time the scheme worked well, but the collapse of the trade boom created a constant surplus of dock labour, and a solution was sought in a further reduction of the number of registered men, particularly those who, while holding tallies, were normally employed in other industries. Registration could be withdrawn if it were found that a man was not normally available for dock work, and in this way, with the active involvement of the union, a progressive reduction was made in the numbers of registered men.[3] This involvement of the union marked a further incorporation into the business of labour discipline, for the power to withdraw a registration was a powerful sanction, and one that the employers were keen to exploit. Thus the 1925 registration scheme contained provisions for dealing with cases of misconduct, such as

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1. Hamilton Whyte, op.cit., p.38; Appendix 1.
2. ibid., p.50; Appendix II.
3. ibid., p.52.

absenteeism, neglect of work, and pilfering, which included the power to withdraw registration, and hence deny the ability to find work.[1]

b) Boots and Shoes

The boot and shoe industry was renowned before World War I for the highly developed state of its collective bargaining arrangements. Its manufacturers were grouped in strong local and national federations, which had begun to develop in the major centres as early as the 1880's. N.U.B.S.O., the main union, enjoyed the advantage of comparatively little competition from sectional societies, and the workforce tended to be well organised, in the major centres at least, in periods of general union decline. At a comparatively early date Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration had appeared in the major centres, and contacts between union and employers thus became regular and institutionalised; at a national level, moves towards national collective bargaining reinforced the tendency on the part of union officials to eschew militancy.[2] The 1895 Terms of Settlement, imposed on the union after its defeat in the national lock-out of that year, further strengthened the trend by establishing a Guarantee Fund,[3] similar to the 'caution money' demanded of the Dockers' Union in Bristol in 1900, which meant that the union incurred financial penalties if either its officials or its members acted in breach of agreements. The 1895 lock-out was the last national stoppage in the industry, and henceforth the drift of union policy was towards a complete rejection of militant tactics in favour of the negotiated settlement.

Conciliation and arbitration boards had existed in Bristol since the 1880s, although collective bargaining and the drawing up of a piece-work statement did not arrive in Kingswood until 1893.[4] But, as seen

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1. Hamilton Whyte, op.cit., Appendix IV, pp.115-118.
2. A. Fox, op.cit., Section VI.
3. A. Fox, op.cit., p.234.
4. E. J. Atkinson, op.cit., p.254.

above, the state of organisation in the area, particularly in Kingswood, was a source of worry to N.U.B.S.O. and to the Employers' Federation alike.[1] The undercutting of wage levels and of prices threatened to undermine collective agreements and the competitiveness of manufacturers in Bristol and elsewhere. We have seen how after 1914, local union officials and federated employers combined to improve the state of union organisation in the area, often with the use of militant tactics to enforce recognition and observance of the 1914 National Agreement. Indeed, the Kingswood boot trade experienced more strikes, most of them very small scale affairs, in the years after organisation returned to the district in 1909, than any other local industry, with the possible exception of the docks. It was a paradoxical situation in an industry where, even locally, there were strong institutional ties between union and employers, and where militancy had been rejected as a policy. It can be explained by the fact that strikes against non-federated employers, to bring them into line with the rest, were condoned by the federated employers, and the whole process was an attempt to strengthen the machinery of national collective bargaining by demonstrating the union's ability to enforce agreements.

When organisation returned to Kingswood in 1909 the union faced a number of problems, but its approach was always conditioned by the overall commitment to conciliation and arbitration, tempered by the need for local militancy. At a local level the apparent contradictions in this approach were resolved by its adopting a different attitude to the federated employers, with whom it re-established the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, and the non-federated employers, with whom it was constantly in conflict. The earlier Board had drawn up, in 1893, a uniform piecework statement of prices to be paid for handwork, and

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1. See Ch. 3, p. 78.

this was still the basis on which the wages of handworkers and outworkers were calculated.[1] But technological change had not entirely passed by Kingswood, and the pre-war period witnessed a marked decline in the number of outworkers and an increase in the amount of factory-based machinery. In Bristol the changes were even more marked. They demanded new systems of wage payment. In Bristol, a Quantity Statement system was introduced in 1809 for clickers,[2] one of the best organised and higher paid sections, whereas in Kingswood, only in 1915 was a committee established to look into the question.[3]

These statements were designed to govern wages for the whole district. But in some factories, or in parts of factories, where organisation was particularly weak, the union had often to agree to lower standards, which were laid out in individual Shop Statements. This seems particularly to have applied to women workers.[4] Yet at the same time as the union was forced to negotiate on this primitive level, it was also making strenuous efforts to establish the principle of the minimum wage, which had become firmly rooted in union policy as a prime aim. The principle of the minimum was already established in Bristol for some sections before 1909, and when organisation returned to Kingswood, the major union thrust was towards its establishment there, and the raising of the minimum throughout the area to the national target of 30s. per week. The main effort of the union in 1911 and 1912 was towards this end and the lowering of working hours to 52½ per week.[5] Rounders, Lasters, Finishers, and Clickers succeeded in winning these

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1. B. J. Atkinson, op.cit., p.259.
2. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, February 1909.
3. N.U.B.S.O., Bristol & Kingswood No. 2 Branch, Mins., May 1915.
4. N.U.B.S.O., Kingswood Branch, Mins., passim.
5. This was a provision of the 1909 National Agreement; Fox, op.cit.

conditions with an Arbitration Board ruling in October 1912.[1]

In view of union weakness, however, it was one matter to establish the principle of a minimum rate, and quite another to enforce its observance on all firms in the district. But since the union was so committed to the conduct of collective bargaining through a district arbitration board and national agreements, and since its credibility in these depended on its ability to enforce the new conditions universally, each successive Arbitration Board award, and each National Agreement, was followed by a period of intense union organising activity and several strikes. The 1914 National Agreement placed the union officials under an even more strict obligation to bring Kingswood into line, for unless they did so, it was stipulated that the manufacturers could refuse any further negotiations on wage increases.[2] The conditions of wartime provided the opportunity for improvements in the Kingswood district. Indeed, during the war the problem for union officials changed from that of how to bring recalcitrant employers into line, to one of how to control their own rank and file, whose new-found militancy threatened to undermine the system of national bargaining and union-federation accommodation. There was an increasing tendency for local branches to pursue local claims as a response to inflation, and for earnings to outstrip basic rates as a result. Even Kingswood participated in this movement.

Reports from Bristol in the union journal, and branch minute books, bear witness to the 'spirit of unrest' that gripped much of industry in 1916 and after. 'Our movement must be aggressive if it is to live,' wrote the secretary of the No. 2 branch in October 1917.[3] Such sentiments

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1. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, October 1912.
2. A. Fox, op.cit., p.348.
3. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, October 1917.

were not usually expressed, even by the local leadership. There was considerable opposition locally to the attempts by national officials to regain control of wage bargaining, since the agreements they negotiated fell short of the gains that could, and had already, been made locally. The Kingswood branch, for example, achieved a local minimum wage of £3 per week for adult males with a 49½ hour week.[1] It was not surprising that the new national agreement which established a 56s. per week minimum incurred very severe criticism from all local branches.[2]

Such gains were the product of the special circumstances of wartime and the immediate post-war boom. The slump hit the boot and shoe trade with particular ferocity, and brought in its train demands for severe wage reductions. But unlike other industries, where these demands were met with an often massive resistance, N.U.B.S.O. put up very little fight.[3] Their capacity for resistance was certainly weakened by the heavy unemployment suffered in the industry, and by the fact that in areas like Kingswood many shops and factories returned to the chaotic conditions of the pre-war years, but also an important factor in the union officials' thinking was their desire to preserve at all costs the machinery of collective bargaining established over several years.

c)= The Mines

We have seen above how the local leadership of the Bristol Miners' Association, and in particular the agent, Whitefield, shrank from militant courses. But the reason for this was not that he had become committed to the processes of conciliation and arbitration; locally, there was no provision in the coal industry for regular and

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1. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, November 1918.
2. ibid., March 1919.
3. A. Fox, op.cit., Section VIII.

institutionalised contact between union and employers. Rather it was a result of the weak economic position of the Bristol mines, and the fear that strikes could result in their final closure. In June 1914, Whitefield's worst fears were realised when the company that owned four of the six local pits - those at Parkfield, Speedwell, Hanham and Deep Pit - was declared bankrupt and the pits closed.[1] The majority of the local miners were thrown out of work, their only means of livelihood being outdoor relief, where this could be secured, and payments from a small local appeal fund. Many left the district in search of work elsewhere. The pits remained closed throughout July and August whilst negotiations were conducted for their sale, and the crisis was not solved until the Lord Mayor intervened by persuading prominent local businessmen to take over the mines. But the prospective owners demanded assurances from the union that the men would not resort to local disputes; they were anxious to avoid, they told Whitefield, any repetition of the 1911 unofficial strikes. Whitefield assured them that 'any buyer would have no fear that anything but what was reasonable, rational and proper would be done by the men.'[2]

Verbal assurances were not sufficient guarantee for the prospective owners. In their agreement with the B.M.A. they secured the union's agreement to arbitration in the event of any dispute, and established a guarantee fund, to be made up of deductions from wages, from which the owners could reimburse themselves if an arbitrator decided that the men had failed to carry out the agreement. This fund was quite different from those already established in the boot and shoe and local docks industries, in that it was based on direct contributions from the workers

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1. W.D.P., 29 June 1914; B.T.M., ibid.
2. B.T.M., 20 August 1914.

themselves, rather than from the union. But resistance was not practicable when the alternative was an indefinite period of unemployment, and a mass meeting unanimously agreed to accept these terms.[1] The pits re-opened in mid-September, amid hopeful expressions from Whitefield that 'industrial peace will prevail.'[2]

The war was already six weeks old when the pits re-opened and the conditions of wartime, coupled with the fact that the new company had secured a contract from the Corporation Electrical Committee to supply coal for the power station, offered the pits a more stable future. In 1915, agitation for wage increases reappeared. In mining these were mainly co-ordinated nationally, and actual advances were settled by district Conciliation Boards. The gains made by Bristol miners were modest compared with other districts. Moreover, Bristol miners were hampered in any effort for higher wages not merely by the guarantee fund and their recent experiences, but by their own attitude to the war. Whitefield was among the most chauvinistic of local Labour leaders, and his views seem to have been shared by most of his members. In August 1915 the M.F.G.B. ballotted its members on the question of the use of the strike weapon during the war. Whitefield campaigned vigorously in Bristol for a vote supporting the undertaking not to strike, and a majority voted in favour.[3] There were no strikes in Bristol pits during the war. Yet, whilst local miners had disavowed militancy, there was no attempt during the war to build on this foundation and establish regularised mediation machinery. Wages were traditionally tied to those paid in Somerset, which were negotiated through the Radstock District Coal Trade Conciliation Board, but the only provision locally for

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1. W.D.P., 29 August 1914.
2. W.D.P., 19 September 1914.
3. B.T.H., 2 August 1915.

mediation in disputes was the clause in the 1914 agreement stipulating that disputes should be referred to an arbitrator who should be specially appointed for the occasion. In a small coalfield such as Bristol with only two local companies operating it was likely that contact between Whitefield and the owners was fairly regular, but there was no attempt, even during wartime, to institutionalise it.

In contrast to the relative calm of wartime, the post-war years witnessed acute conflicts in the coal industry, and a re-emergence of militancy among Bristol miners, at first in their demands for higher wages and the nationalisation of the mines, and later, in their resistance to wage cutting. Whitefield's leadership of the B.M.A. was placed under increasing strain, for on every major issue facing miners between 1919 and 1921 he was out of step with his own rank and file. In 1919 a national wage increase was negotiated, but the local owners insisted that they could not afford to pay. Whitefield accepted their pleas and together they lobbied the five local MPs to demand Government assistance to the owners to enable them to pay the increase.[1] In February 1919 and again in 1920, when the M.F.G.B. balloted its membership on strike resolutions, Whitefield campaigned against, but on each occasion a majority voted for strike action.[2] His hope for industrial peace lay in ruins in the post-war world, and in August 1921, after the Black Friday defeat, he resigned as agent. His successor, a Bedminster miner, C. Gill, proved more responsive to the feelings of the rank and file, and less willing to be intimidated by threats of pit closures and pleas that the local owners could not afford to pay national awards. The militancy of the B.M.A., confronting employers who, faced with falling profits, were in no position to make concessions, thrust the miners into the

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1. W.D.P., 27 March 1919.
2. B.T.M., 22 February 1919; W.D.P., 15 October 1920.

centre of the stage of industrial conflict during the 1920s. As well as the major national disputes in coal mining in 1921, 1925 and 1926, there was a long local lock-out in 1924 when the owners refused to pay a recent national wage increase and insisted on a new district rate.[1] Departures from national bargaining, which threatened the hard-won national minimum rates, were vigorously resisted by the M.F.G.B. In August the local pits were brought to a standstill, and the dispute was not settled until the end of October, when the owners agreed to the terms of the national agreement. One of the casualties of this stoppage, however, was the South Liberty pit in Bedminster, which did not reopen.

d) General

In the three industries studied here a wide variety of collective bargaining relationships co-existed. The extraction of 'caution money' and 'Guarantee Funds', for example, were among the most primitive methods used by employers to tie down the unions. In the docks and the boot and shoe industries these arrangements existed alongside conciliation and arbitration machinery; in some industries the machinery had reached a relatively high level of sophistication, in others, there was still, in 1914, no regularised joint negotiating machinery at either national or local level. In 1910, national agreements existed in the engineering, shipbuilding, cotton spinning, building, printing, iron and steel, and footwear industries.[2] The railways were added to that list in 1911 and the mines in 1912. Thus by the time that the Whitley Committee reported on the subject in 1917 it was taken for granted that bargaining should be on a national level if the prevailing state of organisation on both sides of a particular industry permitted it. In the next few years national collective bargaining was established in a number of other

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1. W.D.P., 5 June - 27 October 1924; B.T.M., ibid.
2. Clegg, Fox & Thompson, op.cit., p.471.

industries, and Industrial Councils set up as the forums for discussions on wages and conditions.

The Whitley proposals were intended to increase the provision for joint consultation at both the local and national levels; but whilst the reports undoubtedly gave a spurt to national negotiations, there was no significant increase in local provisions.[1] Where possible, such local arrangements had already been made, but very little in the way of new machinery in Bristol was created as a result of the Whitley reports, the major exception being the establishment of a Joint Industrial Board for local corporation workers.[2] Private employers in industries where no machinery yet existed showed very little positive interest in the proposals.

In 1918 there remained a number of industries where, despite union organisation, there was no mutually agreed procedure for the settling of disputes or for the regulation of wages and conditions. On the tramways, for example, the company vigorously resisted union attempts to regularise collective bargaining arrangements. Union organisation on the Bristol tramways had long been weak, and as late as 1914, the company had locked out its employees at the Brislington construction works when they refused to accept new working rules unilaterally drawn up by the company.[3] During the war union membership improved, in spite of continued victimisation, and in October 1917 the London and Provincial Licensed Vehicle Workers' Union felt strong enough to call a strike for a wage increase and union recognition.[4] The recognition issue in this case was complex, for the company attempted to exclude union interference by setting up its own system of departmental

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1. K. G. J. C. Knowles, Strikes, p.79.
2. Ref. to this in: B.E.P., 9 November 1933.
3. W.D.P., 16 March - 6 April 1914; B.T.M., ibid.
4. W.D.P., 22 October - 26 October 1917; B.T.M., ibid.

committees with which it was prepared to negotiate. But it was forced by the strike to concede that union officials might accompany the committees in negotiations, and that they would negotiate with the union alone on matters of principle. Limited recognition had been achieved, but locally there was no machinery for future negotiations. In 1918 national negotiations were launched in the tramway industry, but again the achievement was insecure because of the lack of institutionalised backing, and the industry continued to be the scene of open conflict. In 1918, there were two strikes on the Bristol tramways and the highhandedness of the company provoked another in 1920.[1]

Regular and institutionalised contact was one of the main aims of many union officials. In industries such as engineering and boot and shoe, procedures for avoiding disputes were imposed on the unions by strong employers' federations, and accepted only with reluctance by the union officials. But subsequent experience was to show that those officials were at least as committed to that machinery as the employers. In other industries the unions showed even more enthusiasm than the employers. Bevin was particularly keen, as was his General Secretary, Tillett. Indeed, conciliation and arbitration were almost a way of life in the Dockers' Union and joint consultative machinery was set up whenever possible. In the 1920 rule book of the union, its general objects were stated to be: 'To promote the general and material welfare of its members by the forming, wherever possible, of Conciliation and Arbitration Boards.'[2] In those industries organised by the Dockers' Union it was largely hostility or indifference on the part of the employers that stood in the way of further extensions to the machinery of mediation. In his work on strikes, Knowles has argued that the main

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1. W.D.P., 24 - 26 April 1918; 20 - 23 August 1918; 9 August 1920.
2. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Rules, 1920.

impetus towards the settlement of disputes in this way came after the general strike when unions were too weak to support strikes.[1] The evidence from Bristol suggests that the general strike was not an important turning point for the union officials, who consistently showed, even before 1926, a marked preference for conciliation and arbitration as an alternative to strike action. Very few of the conciliation boards or joint consultative machinery which were operating in Bristol in the 1930s were formed after 1926. Many dated from a comparatively early period.

The essential point for the union officials in all this was that they should be recognised as the intermediaries between their members and the employers. This was the very meaning of the term 'union recognition'. For this reason they resisted the attempts of the tramways company to establish contact with its employees which would by-pass the union. The union, it was argued, could not adequately protect its members unless its officials secured the right to represent them in negotiations, since the companies' own employees could be subject to intimidation and victimisation. But recognition contained contradictory elements, for it was not granted without the employers demanding of the officials that they themselves should act responsibly, and that they should use their influence to ensure that their members acted likewise. In other words, it implied that the union officials should take on a disciplinary function.

There were other pressures working in the same direction which applied particularly to the unions of the labour aristocracy. These unions were very concerned to protect the status and respectability of their members, and any member who acted in such a way as to bring the organisation and

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1. Knowles, op.cit., p.79.

the craftsmen into disrepute was severely censured. A powerful weapon in the hands of the branches and the Executives of these unions was the withdrawal of benefit. The minutes of the A.S.E. No. I branch for the period 1898-1920 record several instances of members being reported to the branch, usually by a foreman who was still a member of the society, for offences such as disorderly conduct, spoiling work, drunkenness, and bad time-keeping, which normally incurred the penalty of a withdrawal of donation benefit.[1] But it was not only the labour aristocrats who were concerned with respectability for, as we have seen, this was an important factor with groups like the dockers, and particularly with the officials of the Dockers' Union who were acutely conscious of the reputation of dockers for heavy drinking and irregular working habits. The Dockers' Union, too, employed a range of sanctions to enforce not only obedience to collective agreements, but also obedience to foremen and employers.

The pressure on union officials to respect agreements and enforce them was intensified once they entered into regular and institutionalised contact with employers, for it affected their whole credibility as negotiators when next they met the employers if they had been unable to control their membership. In other words, they accepted a 'peace obligation'. R. Hyman has found in his work on the Workers' Union that these trends reached a high level of development in that union's relationships with employers, particularly during World War I. He has described the contradictions inherent in the union situation thus: 'Responsible trade unionism involves the acceptance of an obligation to control the rank and file, but this in turn implies the acceptance of the legitimacy of managerial authority in an economic system the inequity and inhumanity

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1. A.S.E., Bristol No. 1 Branch, Mins., passim.

of which is the very raison d'etre of trade unionism; it requires the union to exercise quasi-managerial discipline against members who rebel against an oppressive work relationship.'[1]

It can be seen that the success of collective bargaining highlighted the ambiguity of the trade union official's position. Turner has written, with the dockers very much in mind, that 'successful open unionism tends to induce in the workers it benefits, the behaviour characteristics, including an indifference to the organisation of other sections, of its opposite.'[2] Bristol dockers were able, through the extension of their union organisation, and by its involvement in registration schemes, to gain some control over the labour supply to the docks - an achievement which was usually reserved for skilled trade unionists. To this extent they began to develop a solidarity amongst themselves that was largely independent of the fact that they were part of a wider general union. Indeed, the advantages of an alliance of transport and general workers were overwhelmingly weighted in favour of the latter. Yet the dockers did not show much evidence of indifference towards their fellow trade unionists. There is considerable, if circumstantial, evidence that dockers and transport workers had some impact on the unionization of factory workers in the city. In 1917, when tramway workers struck for recognition, dockers were keenly interested in their struggle, and offered support.[3] And through their enthusiasm for the Triple Alliance, dock workers and their allies clearly demonstrated that they had not become immersed in sectionalism, but retained the interest in other workers' struggles which they had displayed in 1910 and 1911.

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1. R. Hyman, The Workers Union, (1971), p.225.
2. Turner, op.cit.
3. See below, p. 150.

As we have seen, there was little significant break in the day-to-day policies pursued by trade union officials in 1926, for the essential narrowness of their view of the role and functions of trade unionism, and their attempts to reduce conflict to a minimum, was already well developed before the General Strike. But the retreat into sectionalism on the part of the rank and file was a development which occurred mainly in the post-General Strike period when, surrounded by a defeated and demoralised working class, those sections which retained their own organisation largely intact, such as the dockers, looked increasingly to their own devices. In the period at present under review, large sections of the working class continued to act, from time to time, as they had in 1910-1912, and came into conflict with their official trade union structure as a result. The following chapter, in which we return to the narrative, attempts to analyse how these conflicts were played out.

CHAPTER FOUR

World War One

On Sunday August 2nd 1914 the British Labour movement held peace demonstrations up and down the country. In Bristol a meeting of organised workers passed a resolution urging British neutrality and calling on the T.U.C. and Labour party to convene a national conference 'to discuss ways and means of preventing this country from being involved in hostilities.' Bevin, the main speaker at the meeting, recalled that he had been 'asked whether he would be in favour of a national strike, if necessary, to prevent hostilities, and he had replied that he would.'[1]

The following Saturday Bevin led a Trades Council deputation to the Lord Mayor, 'to press for a citizens' committee to regulate food prices', and to relieve the unemployment already being experienced as a result of the war.[2] During the intervening week the attempt by the Labour movement to prevent the outbreak of a full-scale European war had collapsed ignominiously. This failure brought to an abrupt end the syndicalist illusions entertained by Bevin. Henceforth, at each succeeding May Day rally, the movement continued to pay lip-service to the spirit of internationalism, whilst at the same time a majority were co-operating, in various degrees, in the war effort.

The I.L.P.'s National Administrative Committee issued a manifesto condemning the war, and Bruce Glasier was sent round the country to organise support for the party's position. In late August he wrote to his daughter, Joanie, from Bristol: 'Our meeting here last night was quite an inspiring one of its kind. There were about 150 members

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1. W.D.P., 3 August 1914.
2. W.D.P., 9 August 1914.

present, and our N.A.C. manifesto was endorsed unanimously, 'though one or two, including an ex-parson and an ex-soldier, put in the usual plea for the necessity of crushing German militarism once and for all, quoting R. Blatchford.

'But it is clear that the war wave is sweeping the country. Almost everyone down here, at any rate in the railway compartments, approves the idea of all young men being sent to the front.'[1]

But the differences within the Labour Movement between pacifists and patriots were not immediately brought into the open. Indeed, the almost unanimous response was a defensive one, summed up by Bevin on his visit to the Council House; 'Whatever their views might be about the war,' he said, 'their only business now was to look after the people and avoid all unnecessary suffering.'[2] At a national level this policy was given formal expression at a conference on August 5th which established the War Emergency Workers' National Committee.[3] Locally, the Trades Council, often acting in conjunction with that committee, adopted the role of watchdog body, and called on the Government to take over control of all foodstuffs and distribute them at 'normal' prices. It also demanded that the Lord Mayor should take action to locate and relieve distress arising out of the war.[4]

These demands could be supported not only by trade unionists but also by the pacifist I.L.P. and the chauvinistic B.S.P. branches. When, under the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund, the Lord Mayor and City Council began to establish relief committees in the wards,

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1. J. B. G. to Jeanie, 29 August 1914, (Glasier papers).
2. W.D.P., 9 August 1914.
3. Royden Harrison, The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, in: Briggs & Savill, ed., Essays in Labour History 1886-1923, (1971), p.211.
4. W.D.P., 7 August 1914.

trades unionists and Labour councillors, including members of the I.L.P., were co-opted onto them alongside Liberal and Tory Councillors, and representatives of religious and charitable institutions.[1] The I.L.P.'s ward organisation was especially valuable in this work. Thus the I.L.P. suffered no immediate loss of influence within the local movement, despite its pacifism.

But in concentrating attention on the immediate threat to living standards the movement had fallen prey to the prevailing assumption that the war would be short-lived. The same assumption lay behind the decision of the T.U.C. to declare, on August 24th, an industrial truce. By the time the truce was declared most disputes in progress when the war broke out had been settled. In Bristol, two small disputes involving seamen and marine engineers were ended.[2] But the strike by local building workers proved more difficult to resolve. On 7th August, 2000 workers, members of the O.B.S., the U.B.L. and the Gasworkers, decided to continue their month old strike for improvements in wages and hours, considering that it was the 'masters who should have shown their patriotic spirit by granting their demands.'[3] The war increased the pressure to break the deadlock, and the Lord Mayor intervened to persuade the employers to slightly improve their offer and thus settle.[4] But at least as important in bringing the strike to an end was the attitude of the national officials of the unions, particularly of the O.B.S. On 5th August the union's Council instructed the Bristol officials to end the dispute and resolved that 'dispute pay cease for all disputes in this

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1. W.D.P., 13 August 1914.
2. W.D.P., 7 August 1914.
3. W.D.P., 8 August 1914.
4. W.D.P., 13 August 1914.

society, on or before Saturday 15th August, 1914.'[1] The conventional picture of the truce as being one of 'willing sacrifice' by the workers was, therefore, not entirely accurate.

The truce was declared unconditionally. Nevertheless, it did not signify a unilateral sacrifice by the unions. As R. Williams, secretary of the N.T.W.F., told Bristol dockers in January 1916, it rested on the assumption that the position of the working class should not be worsened as a result.[2] It rested, too, on the rather naive hope that any sacrifices demanded by the war effort should be borne equally by all classes. 'If people were to suffer on account of the war,' said Bevin, 'profit must be a secondary consideration.'[3] Inevitably the truce proved increasingly untenable, as rapid inflation began to eat into working class living standards and rank and file pressure for wage increases began to force their leaders to take action.

The initial response to inflation was a political one, consisting of repeated demands on the Government for food and price controls. Socialist arguments for more state intervention and control of the economy very largely came to represent the official orthodoxy.

Protest meetings in Bristol in February 1915, organised by the Trades Council, were part of a nationwide campaign to force the Government to take action.[4] But Asquith was unmoved, and refused to countenance any interference with market mechanisms. The result was that the industrial truce broke down, as each union submitted claims for wage increases, although very few of these resulted in strikes in Bristol.

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1. C.B.S., Monthly Report, September 1914.
2. B.T.M., 31 January 1916.
3. W.D.P., 12 August 1914.
4. W.D.P., 2 February 1915.

The dockers won a war bonus in March 1915,[1] by which time many other groups had submitted claims, and by May advances had been won by engineers,[2] boot and shoe workers,[3] bakers[4] and railwaymen.[5] Miners and furniture workers followed in June. Those strikes that did occur in Bristol at this stage were mainly a result of lack of union organisation, and the consequent refusal of employers to pay increases granted to other workers in the same industry; a number of small stoppages in the boot and shoe trade followed this pattern, as did a strike at the Douglas motor-cycle works at Kingswood in May.[6]

Henceforth during the war, the unions, whilst not relinquishing their political aims, exploited to the full their bargaining power. The dockers were most successful, as seen above. The political battle against inflation was pushed into the background. Yet it was this that had united the labour movement as nothing else could. The Trades Council protest meeting in February 1915 provided a common platform for the pacifist Ayles, the pragmatic Bevin, and Mrs. Tillett, wife of Ben, who was rapidly acquiring a reputation as an outright jingoist. Ayles was also invited to speak at a gathering of post office workers in May,[7] and at a mass meeting of the Douglas strikers. Later in the year a campaign against rent increases was launched and Ayles was again a prominent speaker at rallies. By concentrating attention on these economic issues political leaders such as Ayles were able to avoid the isolation which their anti-war position made likely. The I.L.P.

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1. D.H., March 1915.
2. A.S.E., Monthly Report, February 1915.
3. B.T.H., 8 May 1915.
4. B.T.H., 15 March 1915.
5. P. Bagwell, The Railwaymen, p.348, (1963).
6. W.D.P., 4-12 May 1915.
7. W.D.P., 3 May 1915.

preferred not to campaign openly on an anti-war platform, precisely because it feared isolation. In August 1914 the branch was recommended by its Executive Committee that, 'in the present unsettled state of affairs ... summer propaganda be dropped for the present.'[1] In April 1915 it was decided to 'hold the usual summer propaganda meetings on the Downs, fortnightly, ... confining ourselves as far as possible to subjects other than the I.L.P. attitude to the war.'[2] In this way a fragile unity was preserved, but the pressures of the war effort placed it under increasing strain.

These pressures came from two directions. In the spring of 1915 the Government was grappling with the problem of how to increase production of war materials, and place the onus for this on the shoulders of trade unionists whose 'restrictive practices', it argued, were mainly responsible for shortages. Among rank and file trade unionists there was bound to be some resistance to the proposed measures - an outlawing of strikes, and the 'dilution' of skilled work - which undermined hard-won rights and conditions. But the national leaderships of the unions had already shown their support for the war effort by voluntarily declaring an industrial truce. It was but a short step from there to a more active commitment. In March 1915 the national executives of many unions, in a series of meetings with Lloyd George, agreed to allow dilution, and to submit disputes to compulsory arbitration, in return for a pledge that after the war there would be a return to pre-war conditions. The Treasury Agreement, as it was called, was given statutory backing in June 1915 in the first Munitions Act.[3]

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1. I.L.P., Bristol Branch, Mins., August 1914.
2. I.L.P., ibid., April 1915.
3. Cole, Trade Unionism and Munitions, (Oxford 1923), p.72.

These meetings with Lloyd George seemed to the executives to imply a new level of state recognition of the trade union movement; similarly at local level, the bodies established to administer the Act contained co-opted trade union officials. The local Munitions Tribunal, set up to hear cases under the Act, consisted of a trade union and an employers' panel, and an independent assessor. On the union side were Flowers, the District Secretary of the A.S.E., and Bevin.[1] The independent assessor was E. H. C. Wethered, a barrister of the Western Circuit, and well known in labour circles for his work as Chairman of the Bristol Adult School Union, and as a lawyer who frequently represented the unions in workmen's compensation cases. The choice of Wethered would appear to have been a deliberate attempt to make the Tribunal more acceptable to trade union opinion. The choice of Bevin was interesting. He had a past connection with Wethered through the Adult Schools,[2] and as the most able local union official he was clearly chosen to enhance the authority of the Tribunal. Yet Bevin was still regarded as being on the left of the union movement, and certainly in principle he was opposed both to the war, and to the idea of compulsory arbitration in industrial disputes. But as a trade union official he was, above all, pragmatic, and while he personally opposed the war he did nothing to obstruct the war effort.[3] Moreover, his presence on

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1. W.D.P., 2 October 1915.
2. A. Bullock, op.cit., p.10.
3. The war, it seemed, marked a decisive stage in Bevin's move away from direct involvement in political groups, and towards almost total immersion in the trade union world. He had entered the Labour movement through the Bristol branch of the S.D.P. in about 1908, and had risen to prominence within that organisation before he became active in the Dockers' Union in 1910. By 1911, from the minutes of the B.S.S., it was clear that his interest in the society had waned, and in the immediate pre-war years, there were signs that the was flirting with syndicalist ideas. The failure of the Labour movement to prevent the outbreak of war through the use of its industrial power shattered his faith in syndicalism. During the war years, it seems, he entered into membership of the I.L.P., although he was never an active member of the branch. The I.L.P., Bristol branch Minutes for March and May 1917, refer to Bevin's letter of resignation, 'owing to our want of appreciation of his services', and the branch's unsuccessful attempts to dissuade him from this course. This episode has been overlooked by his biographer, who has stressed instead, th 'consistency' of Bevin's career.

the Tribunal, he reasoned, would be a safeguard of his members' interests. But this also placed him in a position of responsibility for the war effort. Moreover, as a member of a judicial tribunal he and others like him were much closer to the role of disciplinary agents within the working class movement than they were when merely trade union officials, for they were called upon to adjudicate on questions of discipline at work. Bevin was also a member of the General Munitions Tribunal for the South West, and this heard cases against strikers, bad time-keepers, and those who the employers considered were lazy; it could extract fines as punishment.[1] Whilst union officials might justify their work on the tribunals as representing a recognition of the union movement by the state, the effect of their inclusion was above all to disarm resistance to attacks on customary trade union rights and conditions, and enormously to increase the effectiveness of their disciplinary powers.

The march of industrial compulsion was paralleled by the inexorable advance of military conscription. It was this question more than any other which forced the Labour movement to clarify its attitude to the war, and brought the latent conflicts to the surface. The local movement contained both jingoes and pacifists, and a great many more who held shades of opinions between these two extremes. The jingoes were best represented by the miners' agent, Whitefield; he was joined by Ben Tillett, still an important local as well as a national figure, Alderman F. Sheppard, Councillors Clothier and Sennington, and the Dockers' district secretary, Geater. The Bristol Socialist Society,

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1. e.g., W.D.P., 30 October 1916; 121 men were brought before the General Munitions Tribunal for the South-West region, and charged with having taken part in a strike. Bevin was one of the assessors. Each man was fined 2s. 6d.

too, was predominantly pro-war, and in 1916 followed Hyndman in splitting with the B.S.P. on this issue.[1] Harrison has described the jingoes as people who were 'easily persuaded that the workers had no rights that ought not to be abandoned, no interests that ought not to be subordinated, to the task of securing a complete victory.'[2] Thus the trades union officials, for example, were willing to relinquish the right to strike for the duration of the war. Tillett's position, however, was more complex. Whilst he was ready to accept the Treasury Agreement, he regarded conscription as a 'great evil' which would, if introduced, 'lead to social revolution and revolt.' 'The only acceptable condition of conscription,' wrote Tillett, 'is that all material sources of wealth be handed over to the custody of the state.'[3] But when the Government decided on conscription Tillett did not raise his voice in protest; for him, the needs of the war effort were of overriding importance.

Bevin's position was best summed up in a speech he made to the N.T.W.F. in 1917. Whilst he was opposed to the war, he refused to associate himself openly either with the anti-war movement, or with the campaign against conscription. He decided, he said, that his best course of action would be 'to do my best to preserve the economic unity of the men I represent and accept passively the opinions of the majority of men.'[4] Meanwhile, he used all his influences with his members, particularly on the docks, to prevent outbreaks of strikes which could harm the war effort, and at the same time, sought to protect his members by winning exemptions from military service for dockers.

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1. W.D.P., 29 May 1916.
2. Royden Harrison, op.cit., p.217.
3. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Annual Report, 1914.
4. A. Bullock, op.cit., p.48.

The views of the trade union officials should not automatically be assumed to be those of the mass of their members, for there was considerable evidence that among the rank and file there was much unease at the threats to their hard-won rights implicit in industrial compulsion and military conscription. Even before the war the threat of conscription had inspired a campaign, in the early months of 1914, by the Trades Council and the I.L.P.[1] There were fears that military conscription would be followed by the militarisation of labour, and these fears were not entirely forgotten in the heat of patriotic fervour. The T.U.C., indeed, registered its opposition to conscription at its Bristol Congress in September 1915 and the Labour Party conference in January 1916, also held in Bristol, followed suit.[2] The Bristol No. 4 branch of the A.S.C.J. 'heartily endorsed the action of the Labour congress of January 6th, and we oppose all measures of compulsion, believing it to be a violation of personal and industrial liberty.'[3] In January the Government had introduced its Conscription Bill, and the battle against it was on in earnest. On January 16th the Trades Council and L.R.C. jointly called an anti-conscription meeting, addressed by Widdicombe, of the Carpenters and President of the Council, Ayles, Brown of the railwaymen, and the L.R.C.'s Vice-President, and Bramley of the furniture workers.[4] Both Widdicombe and Brown advocated the use of the strike weapon to defeat the bill. The bill, however, duly became law; yet the campaign continued, for its repeal. The Gasworkers and the No. 2 branch of N.U.B.S.O. announced their support for the repeal campaign, but the battle had already been lost.[5]

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1. W.D.P., 13 March 1914.
2. G.D.H. Cole, A History of the Labour Party from 1914, (1948), pp.21-31.
3. A.S.C.J., Monthly Journal, February 1916.
4. B.T.M., 17 January 1916.
5. W.D.P., 17 April 1916.

During the campaign against the introduction of conscription the split between pro-war and anti-war wings of the movement was exposed to full public view. The I.L.P. was still, in 1915, the dominant political force within the L.R.C., and this was reflected in the Committee's policy on conscription. The Trades Council, too, followed the I.L.P. line; in June 1915 the Council passed a resolution opposing conscription, and at that stage even Whitefield stated that he did not yet support it, for, he argued, if they once had it they might never get rid of it.[1] In October, as it was becoming clear that Lord Derby's voluntary recruiting campaign would not satisfy the manpower needs of the armed forces, and as the campaign for conscription was gathering momentum in the press, the I.L.P. began to warn the movement of the dangers. A branch meeting sent a resolution to the L.R.C. calling on it to conduct a campaign against conscription; meanwhile the L.R.C. had itself refused even to join in the Labour recruiting campaign.[2]

A group of local trade union leaders - Sheppard, Burt, Clothier, Geater, Jones, and Whitefield - were disturbed by the drift of L.R.C. policy and issued their own 'Bristol Trade Union Manifesto' which called on the workers to enlist in order to avoid the necessity of conscription.[3] In November, this same group, with the aid of Tillett, J. O'Grady M.P.[4]

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1. B.T.M., 21 June 1915.
2. I.L.P., Mins., October 1915.
3. W.D.P., 26 October 1915.
4. J. O'Grady, M.P., (1866-1934); Born in Bristol, of Irish parents, James O'Grady was a cabinet-maker by trade. He had been prominent in Bristol Labour politics in the 1890s before achieving national recognition. He was a founder member of the Bristol Clarion Cyclists, and had been a councillor for Easton Ward from 1897-99. In 1898 he had presided at the annual T.U.C. Congress when it was held in Bristol. He moved to London to become the National Organiser for his union, N.A.F.T.A., and in 1906 he became M.P. for S.E. Leeds, a seat which he held until 1924. During the war he was a frequent visitor to Bristol and made several pro-war speeches, describing his politics at that time as 'Labour Imperialist'. He was also a member of the British delegation to Russia in 1917 which attempted to persuade Kerensky to keep Russia in the war. In 1924 he was appointed Governor of Tasmania, and in 1931 he moved on to the Falkland Islands. He died in 1934.
   See: Bellamy and Saville, Dictionary of Labour Biography, (1974), Vol. 2, pp.286-89.

and Will Crooks M.P., held a Labour recruiting rally at which the Trades Council was attacked for its neutrality towards the recruiting campaign.[1] This group, too, had support in the branches. The A.S.E. No. I branch, of which Ayles was Honorary Treasurer, issued a statement in November, 'That Councillor Ayles is not representative of our members and in no sense reflects our views on the present crisis.'[2] But ordinary trades union support for the anti-conscription position was not lacking and the I.L.P., which was campaigning on its own behalf against conscription, might have been able to win more trade union support for its anti-war position than had previously seemed possible, for only the I.L.P. was able to offer a political lead in this situation. The non-I.L.P. Labour leadership and the trade union leaders, even men like Bevin, were too compromised by their support, open or tacit, for the war effort to offer any alternative to conscription once the question of manpower was raised by the Government. Despite their resolutions of opposition to conscription the Labour Party and T.U.C. vacillated, finally acquiescing in the passing of the Military Service Act.

We have seen that the I.L.P. managed to maintain much of its influence within the local movement during 1915. But during that year it was suffering a declining membership, the total dropping from 500 in 1915 to 350 in 1916.[3] In Avonmouth its losses were so severe that its ward organisation collapsed.[4] A letter of resignation in June 1915 has survived, and may well be typical of the attitude of many lapsed members. The Rev. C. T. Campion of Redland wrote: 'I have dissented from the general I.L.P. attitude towards the war since the middle of August, but have held on, partly because I hoped for a reasonably short

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1. W.D.P., 22 Nov. 1915; B.G.H., ibid.
2. A.S.E., Bristol No. 1 Branch, Mins., Nov. 1915.
3. I.L.P., Mins., April 1916.
4. I.L.P., Mins., April 1915.

war and to find the I.L.P. even more useful than before, partly for local reasons. Now, however, I cannot hold on any longer ...'[1] The I.L.P.'s hope that its propaganda could confine itself to subjects other than the war was utopian in a situation where conscription was the major threat faced by workers, and the party found that its outdoor meetings on the Downs were physically broken up by supporters of the war.[2] Further propaganda had to be carried on through leafletting, indoor meetings, and a short-lived newspaper, the Bristol Forward, which made its appearance at the height of the anti-conscription campaign in January 1916.[3] Even here there were difficulties. It was often difficult to find a hall for meetings, and the I.L.P.'s activities began to attract the attentions of the police, who raided the offices in April 1916 and took away the minute book.[4]

Yet despite this pressure the I.L.P. continued its campaign. The cause was not entirely hopeless, for, as we have seen, there was considerable anxiety in the trade union world about the implications of conscription. But the I.L.P. was unable to capitalise on its opportunities because the fundamental basis of its opposition did not connect in any way with the anxieties of trade unionists. The Trades Council and L.R.C. concentrated on the fear that conscription was being introduced, 'for the purpose of smashing the trade union movement and undermining the power of British democracy.'[5] These sentiments were not entirely absent from I.L.P. propaganda. One of their leaflets, for example, compared conscientious objectors with the Tolpuddle Martyrs.[6] But the predominant feature of I.L.P. opposition was its basis in Christian

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1. C. T. Campion to I.L.P., 25 June 1915.
2. I.L.P., Mins., July 1915.
3. Bristol Forward, January-February 1916.
4. I.L.P., Mins., April 1916.
5. B.T.M., 17 January 1916.
6. Bristol City Archives, Trade Union Papers.

pacifism. Together with Quakers and other religious elements the I.L.P. established the No-Conscription Fellowship, and Ayles, himself a Quaker, was a founder member and sat on its national committee.[1] Much of the I.L.P. propaganda against conscription was conducted in association with the local branch of the N-C.F. Ayles' speech at his court-martial in November 1916, when he was charged with being a deserter from the army, was reprinted as a leaflet by the N-C.F. In it he made a clear exposition of his pacifist position:

'Because horrible outrages and ghastly crimes have been committed by others, that is no reason why I, too, should kill and maim, and destroy. Experience has proved that to do that is no prevention, but an accentuation and an extension of the tragedy. I was always taught that two wrongs do not make a right. I believe that still. I cannot prevent the horrors of war by helping in war. I can only help to prevent them by a refusal to join in war. Hate cannot be destroyed by hate. It can only be transformed by love. That is the deepest and most practical religion I know. My belief is that God, Who gave life, alone has the right to take it.'[2]

It was a well argued case for Christian pacifism. But it did not connect with the views of those large numbers of trade unionists who were also worried about conscription. Brockway has acknowledged the I.L.P.'s failure.

'In England we failed to unite the anti-war struggle with the class struggle sufficiently, with the result that we became isolated from the mass of workers, and too often tended to become bourgeois pacifist rather than working class socialist.'[3]

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1. D. Boulton, Objection Overruled, (London 1967), p.109.
2. W. Ayles, My Higher Duty to Conscience, Humanity and God, (London and Manchester 1916).
3. F. Brockway, Inside the Left, (1947), p.53.

The I.L.P. experienced a growing isolation from the main body of the labour movement and the working class in the later years of the war, at the very time when war-weariness was creating the possibility of a mass movement for peace. During the last two years of war almost the entire resources of the I.L.P. branches were given over to work in support of conscientious objectors. Work within the labour movement tended to be replaced by activity within broad front coalitions such as the N.C.F. and the National Council for Civil Liberties, and later the Bristol Peace Council, founded in October 1916, consisting of the I.L.P. and Christian pacifists.[1] Another important area of activity was the Bristol Joint Advisory Committee for Conscientious Objectors established on I.L.P. initiative in January 1916, linking the I.L.P. with the N.C.F.[2] This Committee launched a consistent propaganda campaign to draw attention to the treatment of C.O.s

One result of this emphasis was the small but perceptible shift in the branches' membership composition, as the central branch, in particular, attracted to its ranks increasing numbers of middle class Christian pacifists, particularly Quakers. A prominent recruit from this source was Miss Tothill, who was chairman of the J.A.C., and a former social worker. Whilst Ayles was in prison continuously after November 1916, women such as Miss Tothill, and the Townleys, who came to Bristol from Lancashire during the war, provided the leadership in the branch.[3] Ward membership figures show that whilst most wards lost members during the war, the heaviest losses were in working class districts, whereas in the more middle class areas of Horfield and

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1. I.L.P., Mins., September 1916.
2. I.L.P., Mins., January 1916.
3. I.L.P., Mins., 1816-1918, passim.

Redland, the membership was relatively stable, and even showed an increase between January 1915 and December 1917.[1]

On the jingo wing of the movement, the outcome of conscription was a growing formal identification with the war effort of those labour leaders who were firmly behind the war. Under the Derby scheme local tribunals were set up to consider cases of exemption from military service. The first Military Service Act provided that these tribunals should hear appeals against military service based on conscientious objection. Among the 'solid local worthies' who made up the Bristol Tribunal were Alderman Sheppard,[2] and councillors Clothier and Sennington.[3] The process of integration of selected 'patriotic' local labour leaders thus made an important advance.

That an important section of the local labour and trade union leadership readily accepted a niche within the various state agencies set up to direct and discipline the working class, was a factor of considerable importance when attention began to be focused later in the war on the problems that peace would bring. The Government and employers feared above all a recurrence of the industrial conflict which had proved so threatening in the pre-war period, when the constraints imposed by the war would have to be lifted. On the other hand, the integration of the trade union leaders into the war effort seemed to offer the prospect of a successful incorporation strategy, aimed at using these leaders as disciplinary agents within the labour movement, on a wider front. By convincing trade union officials that class collaboration could be a

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1. I.L.P., Organiser's Reports, March 1915; December 1917.
2. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, December 1917.
3. Labour Who's Who, 1927.
4. Ibid.

more effective way of serving their members than conflict, it was hoped to head off the likely re-emergence of that conflict. This aim underpinned much of the talk in the later war years about post-war reconstruction.

One of the first acts of the Lloyd George Coalition Government of December 1916 was to appoint a sub-committee of the Reconstruction Committee, under J. H. Whitley M.P., to enquire into the 'relations between employers and employed'. The movement for Industrial Reconstruction thus launched was part of the Cabinet's policy of 'moulding a better world out of the social and economic conditions which have come into being during the war.'[1]

The main ideas of industrial partnership which formed the basis of the Whitley Reports were being aired in Bristol some time before the Committee started work. The initiative, however, came not from anyone directly involved in industry, but from E. H. C. Wethered.[2] In the summer of 1916, he was apparently 'struck by the growing feeling that every possible attempt should be made to give permanence to the better understanding that had grown up during the war among many employers and trade union officials,'[3] and consequently he 'personally approached a number of trade union leaders in Bristol to see whether they would welcome an opportunity for an informal conference with Mr. Arnold Rowntree M.P. and himself. The suggestion was warmly received.'[4] Rowntree's involvement is interesting; he was a Quaker, and an active propagandist for the ideas of the Industrial Reconstruction movement,

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1. A. Marwick, The Deluge, (1967), p.259.
2. For details of this barrister, a well-known and well respected figure in Bristol at the time, see above p. 130.
3. C. Wells & G. F. Stone, Bristol and the Great War, (Bristol 1920), p.326.
4. ibid.

as well as being linked to the family firm in York. A preliminary conference was held in November 1916 when Bevin, Sheppard, and other local union leaders met Wethered and Rowntree.[1]

Before this occurred, however, other prominent figures in the City had taken up the issue. In October, the Bishop spoke of the 'object lesson in class co-operation which the war had provided.' 'If,' he said, 'we have been learning the meaning under stress of what corporate unity, corporate loyalty and corporate actions really can stand for and can affect, may we not look forward with some element of confidence for a solution in the nearer future to those social and religious problems which have hitherto proved so baffling.'[2] The Bishop's optimism was echoed later that month in a speech by Dr. Norwood, Headmaster of Bristol Grammar School, who put forward the proposal that 'the essential thing to do was to get every man into his union and every employer into his Association and then to govern the industry by a joint body of employers and employed.'[3] This was a remarkable proposal, that would have been inconceivable in the pre-war years, and encouraged local Labour leaders such as Sheppard to take a positive interest in the movement. At about this time Sheppard approached a local employer, T. B. Johnston, the managing director of the Bristol Pottery and the Great Western Cotton Factory, 'to see if he could get half a dozen employers to meet half a dozen trade union officials to discuss the situation.'[4] Johnston had long been an advocate of closer

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1. W.D.P., 13 January 1917.
2. B.T.M., 12 October 1916.
3. W.D.P., 22 October 1916; B.T.M., ibid.
   The Bishop of Bristol at this time was the Rt. Rev. G. Nickson D.D., LL.D. Dr. Norwood, (later Sir Cyril Norwood) was Headmaster of Bristol Grammar School from 1906 until the end of 1916, when he moved on to become Head of Marlborough School. According to the historian of Bristol Grammar School he was responsible for the great recovery and revival experienced by the school at that time, and was a widely respected figure, not only in Bristol but also nationally. See: C.P. Hill, The History of Bristol Grammar School, (1951).
4. T. B. Johnston, Industrial Councils and their possibilities, (1919).

co-operation between unions and employers, although in his own factories the unions were weak, due partly it seems to his own paternalistic policies. The meeting took place in November, and agreed with Norwood that 'the most effective way of ensuring industrial peace was through strong organisations on both sides.'[1]

In January 1916 a conference was convened by the Lord Mayor at which a large number of union officials and employers met to discuss the ideas and hear an address from Norwood.[2] Thus, just as in particular industrial disputes the Lord Mayor's 'good offices' were used to bring the two sides together, so in the movement for Industrial Reconstruction it was local dignitaries and professional and religious figures who, since they claimed to stand outside class conflict, played the role of honest broker in attempting to foster a more permanent reconciliation. But a number of union officials were clearly sceptical about the aims of the movement. Whitefield saw reconstruction in socialist terms, and demanded the nationalisation of the railways, the mines and the land. Brown of the N.U.R. looked forward to a time 'when the workers would not be talking of sharing control but taking control.' Neither participated further in meetings with employers. Sheppard, however, who put forward much more limited aims, was to become the pivot of the movement in Bristol. The employers, he said, should recognise the unions, for they were not trying to dictate to them; all they wanted was to have a voice in the conditions of work. The changes he advocated were not political, but rather in the attitudes of employers to workers.[3]

Bevin's relationship to the movement was more equivocal. Despite his commitment to the processes of conciliation and arbitration, he had

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1. T.B. Johnston, op.cit.
2. W.D.P., 13 January 1917; B.T.M., ibid.
3. W.D.P., 13 January 1917; B.T.M., ibid.

not accepted the view that industrial peace was possible. He habitually spoke of industrial relations in terms of conflict. Yet Bevin was nothing if not flexible, as we have seen in his attitude towards compulsory arbitration. His approach to the Industrial Reconstruction movement was equally flexible. His speech at the Council House in January was loaded with scepticism, yet he continued to attend conferences, and when in the summer of 1917, the Bristol Association for Industrial Reconstruction (B.A.I.R.) was launched, Bevin agreed to serve as one of its two Vice-Presidents. The other was T. B. Johnston, and the President was Wethered. Four employers and four union officials made up the Executive Committee.[1]

Official patronage continued to lubricate the efforts to find an accommodation. In particular the flattery of Sheppard, which had been in evidence before the war, helped to attach him even more firmly to the ideas of Industrial Reconstruction. In November 1917 he became the first ever Labour Lord Mayor, not as a recognition of Labour's strength on the Council - its representation was still very weak - but of the strength of the trade union movement.[2] At the same time a local boot manufacturer, P. Steadman, with whom Sheppard had long been associated in trade union work, was appointed Sherriff. The W.D.P. stated quite clearly the purpose of the appointments, which, it said, 'typified the new spirit it is desired to see animating the relations of Labour and Capital.'[3] A year later the same newspaper observed that Sheppard's appointment had 'marked a new departure, and although Frank Sheppards are not to be found at every street corner, the experiment has been so successful that its repetition may be looked for when a suitable opportunity presents itself.'[4]

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1. Bristol Association for Industrial Reconstruction, Works Committees, [A Report of a Conference held on 20/21 April 1918], (Bristol 1918).
2. W.D.P., 10 November 1917; B.T.M., ibid.
3. W.D.P., 9 November 1918.
4. ibid.

The B.A.I.R.'s main work was in organising conferences and publishing reports of their conclusions. The first report, issued after the February 1916 conference on the 'Industrial Outlook' enjoyed a wide circulation in Britain and America.[1] The Bristol Report, as it was called, anticipated many of the ideas of the Whitley Reports. Following the publication of the Whitley Reports, the Association organised conferences to discuss how their proposals could be implemented. Thus in April 1918 a weekend conference was held on the question of Works Committees,[2] and another on the relevance of the proposals to the boot and shoe industry.[3] A conference in March had considered 'the position of women in industry after the war.[4]

The bulk of the reports were exhortative in tone and platitudinous in content. 'A new spirit is needed,' was the theme of the Bristol Report. It acknowledged that 'No palliatives will suffice. The causes which have created and kept alive distrust and suspicion must be ascertained, faced and removed.' Yet it was precisely at the point where the reports tried to offer proposals beyond mere palliatives that their weaknesses were exposed. For beyond advocating stronger organisation and machinery on both sides, the minimum level of agreement, their main recommendations were that changes in attitudes were needed. The Bristol Report recognised some of the basic causes of distrust among workers, such as the fear of unemployment, but their proposals amounted to little more than expressions of sympathy with the workers' situation. The reports took refuge in pious hopes and vague exhortations rather than confronting the very serious questions which underpinned the subject.

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1. The Industrial Outlook, A Report of a Joint Conference between Bristol Employers and Trade Unionists, held on 17/18 February 1917, (Bristol 1917).
2. B.A.I.R., Works Committees.
3. A. Fox, op.cit., p.397.
4. B.A.I.R., The position of Women in Industry after the War, (Bristol 1918).

The B.A.I.R. never effectively answered the question posed by Bevin at the Council House conference: 'What is Capital prepared to concede?'[1] Indeed, the reports indicate that even those employers attached to the Association were prepared to concede very little. On Works Committees, for example, they were not prepared to allow any major encroachments on their managerial prerogatives. The frontier of control was firmly set out so as to preserve the status quo. The Works Committees, the report stated, were to be concerned with domestic questions of general discipline, holidays, shop conditions, decisions of foremen, stoppage of bonus, time keeping, the fixing and adjustment of piece rates, output and costs, overtime, and canteen arrangements. Whilst this might seem to represent a considerable inroad into managerial prerogatives, the report was careful to clarify that what was included under such headings as 'Output and Costs' was merely the passing on of information. Moreover, it proposed, that there should be 'No official connection between the unions and the Committees'.[2] Works Councils of this type were always resisted by leaders like Bevin, who saw them purely as creatures of management.

The employers who supported the ideas of the Association believed that strong organisation on both sides of industry would introduce a more orderly way of settling differences. Johnston and Steadman were very enthusiastic about arrangements for permanent industrial councils at national level to settle questions of wages and hours.[3] The boot and shoe industry had established a National Joint Standing Committee even before the Whitley Committee recommended the formation of similar bodies, and it was stated that the whole negotiating machinery of the

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1. W.D.P., 13 January 1917.
2. B.A.I.R., Works Committees.
3. T. B. Johnston, op.cit.

boot and shoe industry had been 'one of the things which led the Whitley Committee to suggest that the setting up of Joint Industrial Councils was a method which might in the end secure industrial peace.'[1] In the pottery industry, Johnston was largely responsible for the setting up of one of the first J.I.Cs.[2] But in their own workplaces, as the report on Works Committees indicated and as the difficulties experienced by the National Federation of Women Workers in trying to organise and negotiate at the Great Western Cotton Factory revealed, they were much more resistant to encroachments of trade unions on their managerial prerogatives.[3] Indeed, it appears that one of the main motives for drawing the union officials into conferences and the J.I.Cs was to secure their agreement to arrangements which left the status quo within the factory intact through a mutual recognition of each side's rights and responsibilities.

But the B.A.I.R., and Whitleyism in general, had wider political aims. These were stated clearly in the report of Works Committees; 'Making the world safe for Democracy,' it said, 'is only one half of the problem. Democracy must be made safe for the world.'[4] The threats implicit in a growth of trade union membership, and the power that they would wield in the post-war world when wartime restraints were removed were clearly apparent to many employers and to the Government. There were too the dangers from the attachment of trade unionism to socialist or even syndicalist ideology. Thus one of the aims of the promoters of the B.A.I.R. would seem to have been to persuade selected local trade union leaders that more could be gained for their members through a collaborative approach with employers to industry's problems than through

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1. J. C. Wardle, Parlt. Sec., Min. of Lab., (Quoted in A. Fox, op.cit., p.388.)
2. T. B. Johnston, op.cit.
3. N.F.W.W., Annual Report, 1915; W.D.P., 15 July 1914.
4. B.A.I.R., Works Committees.

conflict. Sheppard's elevation to the position of Lord Mayor in 1917 was at least partly designed to offer concrete proof of the advantages to be gained from this kind of moderation.

Sheppard's career illustrates the effectiveness of this strategy. He was an early pioneer of the socialist movement in Bristol and thus retained considerable respect in the movement. But he was also respected in employers' circles as a 'responsible' trade union and labour leader, and for this reason was the object of official flattery even before 1914, being made alderman in 1910, J.P. in 1912 and awarded an Honorary M.A. at Bristol University in the same year. By that time he had largely abandoned many of his early socialist beliefs. His close association with employers on the local Arbitration Boards, and on the City Council, and in his work as lay-preacher on the Methodist Kingswood circuit, fostered a belief that social problems could be best solved 'by the drawing together of men whose interests should be in common.'[1] Such 'responsible' attitudes received every encouragement. During the war Sheppard had been nominated to the local tribunal; he was closely associated with the B.A.I.R., and he was appointed the first Labour Lord Mayor in 1917. So closely did he become associated with the new spirit of class collaboration that in 1918, during the election campaign, he accepted Liberal and Tory offers to stand for Bristol Central as a Labour Coalition candidate. He would have been elected unopposed, but at the cost of subverting the electoral independence of the Labour party. He was forced to withdraw after his union refused him support and the Labour Party, led by Bevin, compelled him to stand down.[2]

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1. F. Sheppard, Labour Unrest and Some of its Causes (Bristol 1912), p.10. See also Biographical Appendix, below, p. 402.
2. See below pp. 164-5.

Bevin's position in this situation was interesting. In many ways his career during the war was similar to Sheppard's. He had agreed to serve the state on the Munitions Tribunal, and he had been closely associated with the B.A.I.R. But the important difference was that Bevin never accepted the ideological implications of this involvement. Precisely because he was essentially pragmatic, he did not believe that class collaboration was possible. Nevertheless, he was prepared to use the opportunities which were being offered for the improvement of organisation on both sides of industry, and the extension of national collective bargaining into new industries. Much of his work in the later years of the war was concerned with national bargaining in industries like flour milling and chocolate and confectionery. He was suspicious of many aspects of the Whitley and Bristol reports, particularly those on shop committees which, he said were 'intended to prevent or sidetrack real trade union organisation.'[1] Nor was he prepared to allow Whitleyism as a political concept to subvert the organisational or electoral independence of the Labour movement, and for this reason he led the attack on Sheppard in 1918. The fact that they had long been close personal and political friends did not deter Bevin from leading the attack. Yet because Bevin himself was very much involved in much the same activities as Sheppard, this had the effect of deflecting much of the criticism that might have been expected to come from the movement, and thus ensured that Sheppard continued to lead the Labour group on the City Council.[2]

The B.A.I.R. was aimed primarily at the trade union officials. It evoked little response among the trade union rank and file. Conferences

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1. D.R., June 1918.
2. See below, p. 165.

were held at a guest house in the Mendips called Penscot, and this was described as a 'helpful factor', for in this environment, far removed from shop-floor conflict, agreement was much more likely.[1] Union branch minute books which survive do not convey the impression that at this level the Industrial Reconstruction movement enjoyed widespread support. Very few branches appear even to have discussed the reports. In 1918 an attempt was made to broaden the basis of the discussion when shop stewards from the boot trade were invited to a conference, but this was the exception.[2] Moreover, because of the attitude of some local officials, large sections of the movement were not represented at the main conferences, including the miners and the railwaymen. The support for this rather rarefied movement must not, therefore, be exaggerated.

Nevertheless, there were serious dangers for the trade union movement in a section of the leadership becoming involved in organisations propagating industrial peace at a time when the rank and file were showing signs of increasing unrest. The last two years of the war witnessed a large number of unofficial strikes as trade unionists displayed a growing disregard for the constraints of wartime. The discontent manifested itself in many ways. There were signs, which became increasingly obvious, of war weariness and a desire for peace. The peace movement will be discussed below. More specific evidence of frustration and militancy was provided by the rising tide of trade union activity. The movement of previously unorganised workers into the unions totally transformed the union situation in Bristol, with no major section of workers remaining untouched by organisation at the end of the war. Inspired by this growing strength and impelled by increasing frustration with inflation the level of activity on the wages front was unprecedented.

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1. Wells & Stone, op.cit., p.325.
2. W.D.P., 15 July 1918.

And while the leaders, who were constrained by legislation and their own preferences, sought to negotiate settlements, their members were more and more prone to take unofficial action.

The list of strikes was impressive. In May 1917 a nationwide wave of unofficial stoppages in the engineering industry was provoked by the Government decision to revoke trade card exemptions for skilled men from military service. This was the only occasion during the war when Bristol engineers joined a strike associated with the unofficial Shop Stewards movement.[1] The summer of 1917 was relatively calm, but in the autumn the level of trade union activity reached a new peak. In October there was reported to be, in N.U.B.S.O., 'a considerable amount of unrest. Our members feel acutely the need for a further advance of wages owing to the ever increasing rise in the price of foodstuffs.'[2] In November the Dockers' District Secretary wrote; 'we have been overwhelmed with applications for an increase of wages, both from the transport and the general workers' sections.'[3] The boot trade witnessed several strikes during the autumn, and in October there was a threat of sympathetic stoppages by a number of unions in support of the tramwaymen's strike for recognition.[4]

The unrest continued into the winter and early spring of 1918, when food shortages and queues added fuel to the flames. A strike by woodworkers brought the aircraft factories at Filton and Brislington to a standstill in December.[5] In April the D.R. reported stoppages on the docks and another short strike occurred on the tramways.[6] Thereafter

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1. W.D.P., 17-23 May 1917.
2. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, October 1917.
3. D.R., November 1917.
4. B.T.H., 24 October 1917.
5. W.D.P., 14-17 December 1917.
6. W.D.P., 24-26 April 1918.

the level of strike activity dropped, partly due to the introduction of more effective food control and rationing schemes, and partly due to the precarious position of the Allied armies in the face of the German spring offensive. But as the war began to turn decisively in the Allies' favour, and as food prices again began to soar upwards, out of control, militancy re-emerged. August witnessed a third major stoppage on the tramways[1] and a strike at the Douglas works.[2] In October the N.U.B.S.O. journal reported that the last month had been 'one of great unrest and agitation, and at one time it looked very serious indeed, as the members generally threatened to kick over the traces.' But by far the most serious stoppage occurred on the railways in September, when locomotive-men in Bristol joined those in other centres on an unofficial strike in protest at their union's acceptance of an offer which met only half their wage claim.[3]

Unofficial action affected the whole of the British Labour movement at this time. In some areas it threw up, or was led by, an independent rank and file leadership based on workplace representatives such as shop stewards. This leadership drew its strength from the reaction to trends within the unions which were universal - the bureaucratisation of the leadership, the incorporation of these and a section of the political leadership into the war effort, and their consequent difficulties in defending their members' interests. These trends applied mainly to the national leaderships of the unions, but they had an impact also in the localities, and there were, as we have seen, definite signs of this among the union officials in Bristol. Yet no significant unofficial rank

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1. W.D.P., 20-23 August 1918.
2. W.D.P., 7 September 1918.
3. W.D.P., 22-27 September 1918.

and file leadership emerged there. The engineering Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee movement had only a minor presence within the factories and workshops of the town; in August 1917 at the first national meeting of the movement, a Bristol delegate was present, but this did not signify a mass following for the S.S. & W.C.M. in Bristol, unlike towns such as Glasgow and Sheffield.[1]

This was not because of a lack of workshop organisation. In the A.S.E. shop stewards had been functioning as dues collectors since at least 1902.[2] During the war many began to take on wider functions, and a strike at the Douglas works in August 1918 was a demand for recognition of stewards as negotiators.[3] But the independent leadership of the Clydeside and Sheffield stewards developed in response to certain specific problems in those areas, as well as to the more universal trends.[4] In particular they derived their strength from the resistance to dilution which necessarily had to be implemented at workshop level, and which their Executive had agreed to in principle. Moreover, the struggle against dilution was most acute in those factories where there had traditionally been a high proportion of skilled craftsmen, particularly the heavy armaments sector of the industry. Bristol was not an armaments centre, although during the war many local engineering firms took on the production of shells; but this was new work, on which there were no customs or practices to uphold, and dilution, together with machine production, was adopted with very little difficulty. Bristol engineering workers do not seem to have resisted dilution; the A.S.E. No. 1 branch minutes contain no mention of the problem during the war.

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1. J. T. Murphy, Preparing for Power, (1972 ed.), p.147.
2. A.S.E., Bristol No. Branch, Mins., March 1902.
3. W.D.P., 7 September 1918.
4. J. Hinton, 'Rank and File Militancy in the Engineering Industry', (London Ph.D. 1970).

Workshop organisation also began to emerge in other industries. There were shop stewards representing the woodworking trades in the aircraft industry, although again they did not follow the pattern of West London aircraft workers in establishing an unofficial leadership.[1] A Joint Trades Aircraft Committee and a Woodworkers' Aircraft Committee were set up in Bristol to co-ordinate trade union policy, but these remained very much under official control. Indeed, the initiative for their formation seems to have come very largely from the national leadership of N.A.F.T.A.[2] The boot and shoe industry had shop stewards who were appointed as dues collectors and recruiting agents and who were appointed by the branch rather than elected in the shop, thus remaining firmly under official control. At no stage did they enter into the negotiating machinery, and whilst shop committees were established in some firms, these concerned themselves exclusively with the 'domestic' questions that were not covered by normal collective bargaining arrangements.[3] On the docks, workplace organisation was almost non-existent. The casual labour system, with its irregularity of employment, and the ease with which employers could keep out known militants, prevented its emergence. But there was evidence of some form of shop steward system. In 1912 the Dockers' No. 3 branch requested permission of the District Committee to appoint two shop stewards, and this was granted, their duties being to enrol new members and check cards.[4] In December 1913, the branch ceased the practice of electing stewards at its quarterly meeting.[5] The only other group of dock workers to appoint shop stewards were the coal porters, a fairly tight-knit group, whose

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1. J. Hinton, op.cit.
2. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Reports, September 1916; June 1917.
3. A. Fox, op.cit., pp.401-2; N.U.B.S.O., Bristol and Kingswood Branches, Mins., passim.
4. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Bristol No. 3 Branch, Mins., January 1912.
5. ibid., December 1913.

stewards had the right to examine members' cards.[1] Most organising work, and all the negotiations on the docks, were carried on by the relatively large staff of full-time officials, who were not subject to the pressures of the casual labour system, although the union did employ some of its lay members, from time to time, as part-time investigators.

After the outbreaks of 1910 and 1911, and despite the continuing number of unofficial stoppages on the docks, the authority of the local Dockers' Union officials was not effectively challenged. Bevin was a major factor in this. Despite his drift towards collaboration, he retained a capacity to fight for his members and for general working class interests, and in the process became the most important figure locally in both the union and Labour party worlds towards the end of the war. During 1917, for example, although he was talking with employers about schemes for industrial peace, he placed himself at the head of a militant agitation for food control. The appointment of Lord Devonport as Food Controller had done little to alleviate the problems of inflation and shortages. Nor did his successor, Lord Rhondda, achieve any immediate success. In July 1917 the Retail Price Index was 104 points above its level of July 1914; effective control was not achieved until October, after which prices remained relatively stable until the summer of 1918. But in the winter food shortages began to be felt.[2] Union leaders faced increasing demands from their members to fight for wage increases, and those members were beginning to take action for themselves. In this situation, Bevin launched his campaign for effective food and price control, placing the onus of responsibility on the state.

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1. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Agreements, Coal Porters, 1914.
2. Beveridge, British Food Control, (Oxford 1927), p.322.

In April Bristol transport workers won their fourth wage increase of the war;[1] yet a month later the No. 3 branch was again demanding that the District Committee should submit another wage claim, and protested 'against the scandalous way in which the food controller is carrying out his duties in the interests of the capitalist class.'[2] A further wage increase was won in October.[3] During the summer, however, Bevin had taken up the question of food control. Addressing a union meeting he attacked profiteering and wastage of food, and argued that the solution was municipal storage and distribution.[4] During the next few weeks he addressed mass meetings on the question, and added the call for a statutory inquiry.

When the Bristol Food Control Committee was set up in October, Bevin, Sheppard and Mrs. Tillett represented the Labour movement.[5] But the outside agitation, with Bevin at its head, continued. A letter he wrote to the W.D.P. in December, in which he advocated the setting up of a Consumers' Union, showed his frustrations with the Committee. They had to spend their time, he said, 'consulting this or that interest and even when the consultation had taken place, very little progress is accomplished.'[6] More drastic remedies were needed. The Trades Council took up the campaign and organised public meetings. At one of these in January, a 'national down-tools policy' was advocated as a means of putting pressure on the Government.[7] The meeting also elected a Food Vigilance Committee, to act in conjunction with a national committee, to keep a check on the work of the Food Control Committee.

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1. D.R., April 1917.
2. D.W.R. & G.W.U., Bristol No. 3 Branch, Mins., May 1917.
3. D.R., October 1917.
4. W.D.P., 9 July 1917.
5. W.D.P., 2 October 1917.
6. W.D.P., 28 December 1917.
7. W.D.P., 7 January 1918.

Ultimately the aim was to be the control of food by 'a co-operative commonwealth chosen by the labour organisations. The railwaymen established their own Food Vigilance Committee which investigated cases of profiteering.[1] This agitation forced the local Food Control Committee to adopt a local rationing scheme for butter and margarine before this became national policy.[2]

The campaign for effective food control provided the movement with a rallying point which it had lacked since 1915. A wide section of the movement was involved, especially in early 1918 when the Trades Council took up the issue. A public meeting in April brought together the Trades Council, the Food Vigilance Committee, which was representative of unions and political groups, and the Bristol Co-operative Society.[3] Thus the food control issue, in bringing the movement together around the demand for greater state intervention, provided it with a rallying point which had previously been lacking, and thereby consolidated it behind the official leadership, and its state socialist policies. This was of crucial importance in a year when the movement was undergoing extensive organisational and programmatic changes.

To assume the inevitability of this consolidation is to ignore the fact that in 1917 and early 1918 there were real, if limited, possibilities for the establishment of an alternative leadership within the movement in many areas, if not in Bristol. In early 1918, especially, the combined effects of the food crisis, the desire for peace at a time when the war seemed endlessly stalemated, and the growing demands upon skilled workers from the state with its new Manpower Bill, produced a

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1. W.D.P., 15 January 1918.
2. C. Wells & G. F. Stone, op.cit., p.310.
3. W.D.P., 15 April 1918.

potentially explosive situation. The Manpower Bill represented a further extension of the state's demands upon the working class, by the proposed conscription of workers hitherto exempt, particularly of skilled workers. Demands for strikes on the food question and on the Manpower Bill were being widely voiced. Three Bristol A.S.C. & J. branches sent resolutions to their E.C. calling for a 'ballot of all members on a down-tools policy in the event of the (Manpower) scheme being put into operation.'[1] The S.S. & W.C.M. issued a call for strikes against the bill and also attempted to link this discontent with the demand for peace.[2] An attack upon the Government upon such a wide front would have been the most serious challenge it had yet had to face.

The attempt failed. An important element in any attempt to generalise discontents into a broad challenge to the Government was political leadership. Leading members of the S.S. & W.C.M. were members of the B.S.P. and the S.L.P., whilst Kirkwood was a member of the I.L.P. In Bristol no such leadership was available. The S.L.P. had little or no presence, whilst the B.S.S. was firmly pro-war in sympathy and had no influence in the workshops. Again an opportunity existed for the I.L.P., as the only anti-war group within the local Labour movement. But as we have seen, the weakness of the I.L.P. was precisely its neglect, after 1916, of the issues most vital to workers, and its addiction to the politics of individual conscience. Almost the whole of the efforts of the I.L.P. in the last two years of war were devoted to assisting imprisoned C.O.s and their families. This was valuable work in itself, but it represented a retreat from the challenging

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1. A.S.C. & J., Monthly Journal, February 1918.
2. J. Hinton, op.cit., pp.360-370.

situation in 1917 and early 1918 when the growing militancy and war-weariness provided anti-war groups with the chance of breaking out of their isolation.

During 1917 there were signs that the I.L.P. might rise to the challenge. In February 1917, together with the L.R.C. and the U.D.C., it organised a conference on 'Labour and Democratic Control', which was 'to consider the position of the trade union, co-operative and general Labour movement regarding the principles which should underlie the settlement at the close of the war in order to establish a durable peace.'[1] In July the I.L.P. secured a wider audience for its views. The previous month in Leeds the I.L.P. and B.S.P. had jointly sponsored a convention to welcome the Russian revolution and to issue a call for the formation of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. On July 29th a conference was held in Bristol to consider the formation of a local Council; 116 delegates representing 103 labour, co-operative and socialist organisations were present, and called for the co-ordination of working class activity for peace.[2] The Ministry of Munitions Intelligence report described the Bristol conference as successful.[3] Moreover, there was some potential to be tapped locally in the building of a peace movement. In August the Kingswood branch secretary of N.U.B.S.O. wrote that '... it looks as if labour will have to make a determined stand in the near future and say that the war must end and a democratic peace be brought about by democracy.[4] But the idea of a Workers' and Soldiers' Council sank without trace. It was not taken up in the movement, and although the I.L.P. halfheartedly tried to maintain the impetus generated by the conference, lack of interest by the unions and the Labour party killed the idea.

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1. Labour and Democratic Control, Circular announcing Conference, sponsored by L.R.C., I.L.P. and U.D.C., (1917).
2. W.D.P., 30 July 1917; B.T.M., ibid.
3. Ministry of Munitions, Intelligence reports, July 1917, in P.R.O. (5/56).
4. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, August 1917.

Moreover, the sponsors of the conference viewed its aims within very narrow limits. E. C. Fairchild, a member of the Provisional Committee of Working and Soldiers' Councils, said at the Bristol conference that the aim was to act as a co-ordinating body, operating inside the Labour party, aiming to transform it 'from the purely opportunist body it now is to one that will stand for a definite reconstruction of society on socialist lines.'[1] The Labour party N.E.C.'s response was, on the one hand, to repudiate the Leeds convention and advise affiliated societies not to join local councils, but on the other hand, to outflank this swing to the left in the movement by adopting, in December, the war aims of the U.D.C., and in January 1918, a new constitution and programme, containing a commitment to the socialist transformation of society.[2]

Since this had always been the prime object of the I.L.P., its agitation during 1917 was successful. But the I.L.P. largely withdrew from active propaganda on the question of peace once the Labour party had adopted its peace aims. Its withdrawal served to isolate politically the militants. The Manpower bill, an extension of conscription, which the I.L.P. had always opposed, raised no protest from the Bristol branch. Nor did it intervene in the food control campaign, despite the fact that the state socialist assumptions on which it was based were a key element in I.L.P. politics. The result was that there was no political grouping with the ability to generalise the various struggles that were going on, and the several manifestations of war weariness were effectively kept separate. The field was left free for the official leadership to contain the struggle within manageable limits, by confining the main thrust to

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1. W.D.P., 30 July 1917.
2. Cole, op.cit., (1948).

the relatively narrow issue of food control, and ignoring the other issues of an extension to conscription and the vague but nevertheless real desire for an end to the war.

The war was approaching its climax. During that struggle the Labour movement, at all levels, had collaborated in the prosecution of the war effort, and made concessions to the pressures for national unity. Labour ministers had entered Lloyd George's second Coalition cabinet; Labour councillors had co-operated in the recruitment and conscription processes; trade union officials had sought to minimise industrial conflict and maximise production; and rank and file trade unionists had, for the most part, acquiesced. But in the last eighteen months of the war those who had opposed the war, and the movement's response to it, increasingly found themselves in the situation of representing the new orthodoxy in the movement. The Labour Party's swing to the left was an unmistakable trend and it approached the peace in a new spirit of political independence. This change was itself a reflection of the radicalisation which the working class, as a direct result of the war, was experiencing. But how far the Labour Party would be able to capture that mood, maximise its political impact, and thus capitalise on it fully in the struggle for social change, was a question which remained open. It would depend in large measure on how far the changes in the Labour Party in 1918 represented a real break with the past, not merely with the formal Lib/Labism of electoral compacts and participation in coalition Governments, but also with the ideological and theoretical propositions which underpinned it. It would depend also on developments within the working class.

CHAPTER FIVE

1918 - 1926

I) The New Party Constitution and the 1918 General Election

In the Spring of 1918 the local Labour movement began the process of its own reconstruction, in line with the new Labour Party constitution, and in preparation for the political battles that were expected to accompany the peace. The decision to transform the Labour Party from a federal organisation into one based on individual membership was put into effect with the establishment of local Labour Parties in the constituencies; in Bristol North a C.L.P. was established in March, in the East in May, and in the South and Central first steps were taken in the spring and summer.[1] An attempt was made to form a C.L.P. in Conservative dominated Bristol West, but it was not until 1924 that a viable party could be created there. In the late summer the question was taken up in the outlying districts; a meeting to form a local Labour Party for Kingswood was held at the N.U.B.S.O. offices in August.[2]

The Bristol L.R.C. had initiated the task of reconstruction in November 1917. An ad hoc body, the Bristol East Parliamentary Committee, had been in existence since before the war, and Ayles was its prospective parliamentary candidate. In November 1917 the L.R.C. announced that it was to reorganise this committee, and in January 1918 a parliamentary fund was reopened.[3] These tentative moves were rapidly overtaken, however, when the new party constitution was adopted and it was decided to establish C.L.P.s wherever possible. Moreover, a series of

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1. I.L.P., Mins., passim; Bristol East C.L.P., 1st Annual Meeting, Mins., May 1918.
2. N.U.B.S.O., Bristol & Kingswood No. 2 Branch, Mins., August 1918.
3. I.L.P., Mins., November 1917.

conferences organised by the L.R.C. in March, April and May 1918 discussed the possibilities of mounting a challenge at the next General Election on an unprecedented scale.[1] The aim of contesting all five seats proved too ambitious, but in the South, Central, North and East the beginnings of electoral organisation were established, and the task of preparing for the election began.

Within the new C.L.P.s the preponderance of the traditional centres of Labour movement political activity continued. The composition of the East C.L.P.'s Executive Committee is known, and this shows the very strong influence of the I.L.P. Four of the six officers of the new party were I.L.P. members; on the E.C., the I.L.P. held, as of right, five of the sixteen places, whilst seven were shared between the unions and four were individual membership representatives.[2] But several of these other delegates were also I.L.P. members, since the individual membership organisations of the party, the ward parties, existed in name only at this stage. The I.L.P. enjoyed an unusual strength in the East C.L.P. since both the East and Central branches of the party were active in the political work of the division. Nevertheless, it is significant that the I.L.P. which had been relatively isolated during the latter war years could still play a key role in the rebuilding of the movement. Partly this was due to the fact it was the only grouping within the movement which possessed the necessary experience and ward organisation without which any electoral effort would have been impossible. But also, the issues which had long isolated the I.L.P. from the bulk of the movement were, by the spring and summer of 1918, beginning to

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1. I.L.P., Mins., February-May 1918.
2. Bristol East C.L.P., 1st Annual Meeting, April 1918, Mins.

lose their importance, and the questions posed by the coming peace were ever more pressing. The I.L.P. was showing signs of revival itself. The decline in membership was halted during 1918 and during the summer it restarted open-air propaganda.[1] The changing mood of the working class, and the rebuilding of the political wing of the Labour movement, combined to produce a situation where the I.L.P. was able to break out of its isolation and reassert its position in the mainstream of the movement.

In Bristol East the unions played a relatively minor role in the building of the new party. N.U.B.S.O. and the N.U.R. were active, but the general unions were not well represented in the party. The major interest for N.U.B.S.O., however, was in Kingswood, where the local Labour Party initially revolved completely around the union. In the South, the giant Dockers' Union played a much more active role. The Dockers had traditionally claimed Bedminster as their sphere of influence within the L.R.C., and the opening of the Dockers' Hall in Bedminster in 1918 provided a focus for Labour movement activity within the area which confirmed the central position of the Dockers' Union.[2] Elsewhere, the balance of forces was less clear cut, and reflected more the very diversity of the movement.

Armed with its new constitution and its programme, Labour and the New Social Order, the Labour Party set about preparing for the approaching General Election. In Bristol South, T. C. Lewis, a Dockers' Union official, was adopted as candidate in August.[3] F. Sheppard was adopted in Bristol Central in October, with Coalition support,[4] but in the East the long standing candidature of Ayles had to be withdrawn due to lack of finance by his sponsors, the Central I.L.P. branch.[5] When

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1. I.L.P., Mins., April 1918.
2. W.D.P., 27 May 1918.
3. I.L.P., Mins., August 1918.
4. I.L.P., Mins., September-October 1918.
5. I.L.P., Mins., September-November 1918.

Lloyd George made his shock announcement of an election immediately after the signing of the armistice the East C.L.P. was still without a candidate. The East I.L.P. decided to sponsor L. Bateman, with help from the central branch and his union the N.U.R. In the North, an A.S.E. sponsored candidate, J. Kaylor, was to carry the Labour banner.

The decision of the Labour Party conference of 14th November to break with the coalition and fight the election as an independent force precipitated a crisis in Bristol, for Sheppard was sure to be returned in the Central division with Coalition support. His support for the Lloyd George Government and his willingness to sacrifice the electoral independence of the Labour Party was the logical outcome of the position he and many others had adopted during the war. But the developments of 1918 within the Labour Party were symptomatic of a desire within the movement for a break with the politics of accommodation which had characterised the performance of the Labour Party in Parliament and locally since before 1914. The decision of the 14th November conference was a crystallisation of that trend, and Sheppard's continuing support for the Coalition placed him outside the mainstream of Labour politics.

In accordance with the Conference decision, Sheppard's union, N.U.B.S.O., withdrew financial support.[1] Nevertheless, he persisted in his desire to fight on the Labour-Coalition ticket, and had finally to be forced out, with Bevin leading the attack. Opening the campaign against Sheppard, Bevin said that as a trade unionist he advocated the policy of 'stick to your pals when they're pals, but when they negotiate with the other side, cut your losses.'[2] He could not allow friendship to cut across principle. This was an uncharacteristic stance for Bevin.

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1. W.D.P., 2 December 1918.
2. ibid.

His war record had been much the same as Sheppard's, and 'negotiating with the other side' was part of his way of life. But in Bevin's view there was a sharp difference between trade union action, in which accommodation with employers could be justified as a temporary expedient, and political action, where a certain loyalty to principle was required, and the most important principle of all was electoral independence. He himself replaced Sheppard as candidate in Central in order to preserve the newly asserted independence. In doing so, Bevin, along with much of the national Labour leadership at the time, showed a sensitivity to the mood prevailing within the working class and the Labour movement at the end of the war. He had already shown his ability to tap that mood when he led the campaign for food control. So too during the General Election, he attempted to channel workers' militancy into the Labour party's campaign for radical measures of reform. Thus, although in his every day work and his association with the B.A.I.R. he had developed a close association with 'the other side', in the more sensitive area of political activity Bevin declared himself opposed to any form of compact, and talked the language of class warfare. 'Lloyd George,' he said, 'had thrown down the gauntlet in the interests of the capitalist class, and Labour had accepted the challenge.'[1]

The Morning Post said of Bevin that, among the four local Labour candidates, he was 'much the most likely to get within measurable distance of Parliament.'[2] In fact, Labour's best opportunity was in the East, a seat they had contested in the past, and where the traditionally solid Liberal vote was split between the Lloyd George and Asquithian wings, since the sitting member, C. E. Hobhouse, refused to support the

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1. W.D.P., 2 December 1918.
2. Bullock, op.cit., p.90.

coalition, and was opposed by G. B. Britton, a local boot manufacturer.[1] The opposition was split in the North also, where the Coalition Liberal was challenged by a National Party candidate.[2] In the South and Central there were straight fights; in the former the sitting member, Alderman W. Howell Davies, took the Coalition Liberal ticket, whilst in the Central, a new division, the banner was carried by a Tory, T. W. Inskip, K.C., who was more likely to appeal to the strong commercial and business vote in the division than Bevin.

The two weeks preceding polling day were the scene of intense political activity. Each Labour candidate addressed some six or more meetings daily. The Colston Hall rally on December 8th was described by the W.D.P. as the 'largest and most successful political demonstration that has been held in Bristol during recent years.'[3] The scale of Labour's challenge clearly surprised their opponents, whose response was to intensify their own campaign. On 11th December Lloyd George switched a meeting from Leicester to Bristol, a recognition, in the words of The Times' correspondent, 'of the formidable bid which Labour candidates are making to win seats from the Coalition.'[4]

The Labour candidates embarked on the election campaign armed with comprehensive and radical programmes of reconstruction; Lewis's address, for example, covered questions of the peace settlement, the treatment of discharged soldiers and sailors, the restoration of pre-war trade union conditions, the establishment of a legal maximum working week of 44 hours and a legal minimum wage, reforms in Old Age Pensions, abolition of the Poor Law, and the elimination of unemployment, a 'complete and

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1. The Times, 9 December 1918.
2. The Times, 9 December 1918.
3. W.D.P., 9 December 1918.
4. The Times, 11 December 1918.

comprehensive scheme for housing,' and extensive reforms in education.[1] Never before, and rarely since, have Labour candidates appealed to the electorate on such a comprehensive and far-reaching platform, which not only pointed up the need for extensive social reforms, but also offered support to independence movements in Ireland and India. Moreover, there were important elements of a socialist programme in the Labour appeal, promising the 'retention by the state of all raw materials now in its possession and the national factories', and the 'socialisation of the Banks, the Railways, Mines, Minerals, Lands and all forms of monopoly, with democratic control.'[2] But there were noticeable differences between the programmes of the various candidates. On the question of working hours, Bateman was only prepared to offer a 48 hour working week,[3] whilst Kaylor did not mention it at all. Even on nationalisation there were differences, despite the common basis of Clause Four. Bevin had very little to say on the subject; Kaylor advocated the nationalisation of land, mines, railways, canals, shipping and armaments,[4] and Bateman wanted it for railways, mines, canals, harbours and electricity;[5] both stopped far short of Lewis's programme. These inconsistencies did not have any direct bearing on the campaign, but they revealed a certain failure to approach the election systematically and coherently. Labour had been caught off guard by Lloyd George's snap election, and the results were visible in its approach to the campaign.

On certain issues Labour succeeded in seizing the initiative. They had much more to say to women voters, calling for equal pay for

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1. Bristol South C.L.P., T.C. Lewis's Address, 1918 General Election.
2. ibid.
3. W.D.P., 9 December 1918.
4. W.D.P., 9 December 1918.
5. W.D.P., 9 December 1918.

equal work. But, most importantly, on the issue of conscription the Coalition candidates felt it necessary to answer Labour claims that the Lloyd George Government would not abolish it. Indeed, much of Lloyd George's speech at the Colston Hall was concerned with rebutting these charges and with reasserting the issues which the Coalition placed at the centre of the campaign, those of making Germany pay for the war and of retaining in office the men who had won the war.[1] He was undoubtedly successful. In the five days between his Bristol speech and polling day it was the Labour candidates who were pushed onto the defensive and forced to clarify their position towards indemnities. Both Bevin and Lewis agreed with the Coalition that Germany must make good all the damage but insisted that there should be no penal indemnity.[2] But once they had agreed with the Coalition about German responsibility for the war, they had conceded the argument, for they were unable to compete with Lloyd George on this issue.

Bevin's campaign illustrates well Labour's retreat in the face of massive pressure. He began on December 1st with a speech in which he concentrated on the need to defend the Russian revolution against British and Allied intervention. A resolution passed at this meeting, prefiguring the Council Of Action in 1920, called on 'the Triple (Labour) Alliance and other great trade unions to meet at once and consider a policy which will secure a declaration from the Government that further interference with Russia shall cease.'[3] The Russian issue was prominent in the early part of Bevin's campaign, but it laid him open to charges of association with Bolshevism. The attempt to connect the Labour Party with Bolshevism and syndicalism and with pacifism and pro-German

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1. W.D.P., 12 December 1918.
2. W.D.P., 13 December 1918.
3. W.D.P., 2 December 1918.

sympathies was used to great advantage by the Coalition candidates and their press. Thus the W.D.P. in a leader on 13th December spoke of the Labour Party as being divided into two sections - the responsible elements such as Clynes, Henderson, Barnes, and, of course, Sheppard, and a section 'that is really antagonistic to socialism. It is syndicalist, which is another word for Bolshevism. It cares nothing for trade unionism.' It went on: 'Happily none of the local Labour candidates belong to this extreme section. ... But they are candidates of an organisation that not only tolerates Bolshevists but in some constituencies adopts them as candidates against able and trustworthy Labour leaders.'[1]

Bevin was particularly sensitive to this form of attack since the Central division contained a large middle class vote. He thus spent much of the latter part of his campaign seeking to disavow any revolutionary intentions. Indeed, his main line of attack was that the Labour Party provided the only effective barrier to revolution, for a strong Labour Party in Parliament would restore to that institution its ability to respond to the 'growing aspirations of the people', and thus its respect. 'Immediately the people lose respect for Parliament', he warned, 'revolution is bound to take place'.[2] The snap election, and the attempt by the Coalition to snatch a victory before the soldiers returned, could only bring Parliament into disrepute and thereby cause a revolution.

Undoubtedly the beating of the patriotic drum was responsible for the sweeping Coalition successes in the election, with all five local seats won. In the South, Central and North, Labour was beaten by substantial majorities, and only in the East was the Labour threat serious,

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1. W.D.P., 13 December 1918.
2. W.D.P., 5 December 1918.

Bateman coming within 1300 votes of victory. Bateman, despite his I.L.P. membership, polled better than the trade union candidates, who are usually said by historians to have done better at this election. But complete though the Coalition success was, the Labour Party had made an unmistakable impact on the campaign, had established itself as a party contending seriously for political office, and polled 26,688 votes, or some 32% of the total, rather more than the national average of 22.2%.[1] The results of the 1918 election had placed the question of how to contain the threat from Labour to established political relationships at the centre of politics in the next few years.

II) The Labour Movement and Class Consciousness

The strong Labour vote in 1918 was a reflection of the fierce undercurrent of class conflict running through the election campaign, on both sides of the political divide. This conflict was at the centre of politics in the post-war years, although it was not necessarily fought out in the established political arena. The 'Coupon' election produced a certain cynicism towards Parliamentary politics in general, at a time when the strength of the primary defensive organisations of the working class, the trade unions, encouraged large numbers of workers to pursue their aspirations by industrial rather than parliamentary action. The political presence of the working class was thus expressed, in the immediate post-war years, far more directly through the unions than through the Labour Party, and this introduced elements of uncertainty into the political scene, not the least of which was an uncertainty about the relationship between the Labour movement and its constituency, the working class.

1. D. Butler & J. Freeman, British Political Facts 1900-1967, (1968), p.141.

The working class emerged from the war with a heightened desire for widespread and radical change, and a more militant determination to pursue reforms. Few would agree totally with J. T. Murphy, however, when he described the situation in terms of 'a working class offensive against capitalism.'[1] His mistake was to confuse the highest expression of working class militancy at the time, that of the Clydeside engineers in their '40 hours' strike of January 1919, with the general mood of workers throughout the country. In Bristol, class conflict never reached such an acute pitch as on the Clyde. Nevertheless, even in Bristol, the assertion by workers of their aspirations and demands upon the social, economic and political system achieved a rare degree of militancy.[2] Thus the period in which the Labour movement was rebuilding its political wing and redefining its internal relationships, was also one in which the working class itself was undergoing significant changes, which in their turn reacted upon the movement.

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1. J. T. Murphy, op.cit., p.176.
2. The main evidence for this claim is the demands which workers made at this time and the increased level of strike activity in support of those demands. The demands were, of course, mainly concerned with wages, although here too there were greatly increased expectations. (See below p.173) Yet there was, also, a greater awareness of international questions and an increasing readiness to express a trade union point of view on such issues. In 1919, and in the early 1920s, May Day demonstrations were unusually well attended by thousands of trade unionists. The usual resolutions of international working class solidarity were passed. Interest in international affairs was not confined to the annual May Day rallies. In 1919, for example, a local branch of the O.B.S. demanded the immediate withdrawal of all British troops from Russia and the raising of the blockade on that country.
(W.D.P., 10 April 1919).
British intervention in Russia also aroused the wrath of local dock workers. A dockers' mass meeting in October 1919 resolved that it 'regards the actions of the allies in the blockade of Russia as a barbarous crime, and repudiates the right of the Government to make such a request (sic) in the name of the British people. It calls upon the Government to immediately cease supplies of munitions to Denakin, Kolchak and other revolutionaries.'
(W.D.P., 20 October 1919).

To understand these changes we need to know precisely what kind of consciousness was beginning to emerge. Consciousness is an unquantifiable phenomenon which cannot easily be identified, especially with reference to the readily available institutional sources. Personal accounts, if available, can be of use, but the worker who resorted to print was not typical, and cannot be quoted uncritically as a guide to the consciousness of his fellows. Interviews with surviving activists can be valuable, but memories are inevitably clouded by subsequent experiences. Moreover, too heavy a concentration on individuals can distort the picture, for we are concerned with the collective consciousness of the class, or sections of that class. A guide to this can be obtained by reference to the actions workers took, or were prepared to take, and in pursuit of what demands.

The pattern of strike activity affords a rough measure of working class militancy. The period 1919-1926 broadly divides into three phases. The years 1919-1921 were dominated by major clashes between the unions and the state, with the national railway strike of 1919, the miners' datum line strike in 1920 and the post Black Friday miners' lock-out in 1921. In the earlier clashes it was the unions who were on the offensive, but the tide had turned by 1921, and the struggles in that year were predominantly defensive. Meanwhile, smaller scale, mainly local stoppages had contributed to the disturbed industrial scene in Bristol; short dock strikes in April and July 1919[1] were followed by stoppages of gasworkers[2], road transport workers[3], seamen[4], and tramwaymen[5], and dockers[6] again, in 1920.

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1. W.D.P., 12 April 1919; B.T.M., ibid; W.D.P., 22-23 July 1919.
2. W.D.P., 10-17 July 1920.
3. W.D.P., 23 November-18 December 1920.
4. W.D.P., 27 November-11 December 1920.
5. W.D.P., 9 August 1920.
6. W.D.P., 29 April 1920.

In the second phase, 1922-1923, the unions were forced back even more onto the defensive by the employers' offensive, which reached its most militant expression in the 1922 engineering lock-out. After the Black Friday defeat, massive confrontations involving the state were rare, union leaderships accepted wage reductions, and the stage was largely held by more localised stoppages, often unofficial. Strikes of this type were engaged in by Bristol seamen in May 1921,[1] dockers in 1922 and 1923,[2] and tramwaymen in 1923.[3] The following year, however, witnessed a series of official national stoppages, some of which involved intervention by the Labour Government. The A.S.L.E.F. strike in January was followed by the only official national dock strike in these years, and the building workers' lock-out in July. In that same month also Bristol miners downed tools in a dispute with the local employers that was not finally settled until October.[4] During 1925, local seamen who were members of the A.M.W.U. joined a national stoppage.[5] The period 1924-1926 thus saw workers beginning to emerge from their defensive posture of the middle phase and seek to win back some of their losses. Yet at the same time, the miners were called upon to resist renewed attacks on their wages and conditions, and this culminated in Red Friday in 1925 and the general strike of the following year.

This broad outline shows something of the dangers of describing consciousness as either offensive or defensive. There were examples of both defensive and offensive strikes in each of the three phases, and each strike contained elements of both, either in the demands around which it was fought, or in the manner in which it was fought. In the

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1. W.D.P., 11 May 1921.
2. B.T.M., 11 October 1922; W.D.P., 3-13 July 1923; B.T.M., ibid.
3. W.D.P., 5-11 June 1923; B.T.M., ibid.
4. W.D.P., July-November 1924; B.T.M., ibid.
5. B.T.M., 1 September-14 October 1925; W.D.P., ibid.

immediate post-war years a big push was made by the unions for shorter hours and higher wages, in which all sections participated. On these matters the demands were often very high. For example, 16s. a day for dockers,[1] a £4 per week minimum wage for Bristol boot and shoe workers,[2] in 1920 - but could hardly be said to strike at the very basis of capitalism. There was no suggestion from strikers that workers should receive a larger share of the national cake; wage demands were framed mainly in terms of the danger to living standards from inflation, and were in this sense defensive.

On other issues a more militant assertiveness was in evidence. Dockers struck in July 1919 for holiday pay, a demand that would have appeared unattainable and utopian only five years previously.[3] Many of the small dock strikes of the period centred around issues which raised the question of who controlled the docks, union or management. On a number of occasions grain porters struck against the use of machinery whilst large numbers of their fellows were unemployed.[4] In itself, this represented a challenge to the unrestricted exercise of managerial authority, something which union officials always scrupulously avoided. So seriously did traders and merchants regard union encroachments on their managerial power that in May 1926, through the Chamber of Commerce, they called on 'the Docks Committee, backed by the City Council, to ensure that there shall be free and untrammelled access for all persons whose lawful business may take them into the docks.'[5]

But the issue of control was not uppermost in the minds of workers even when, by their very actions, they were objectively challenging managerial prerogatives. Generally it was the employers who, because of

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1. A. Bullock, op.cit., p.120; This was the demand put forward by Bevin at the Shaw Inquiry.
2. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, March 1920.
3. W.D.P., 22-23 July 1919.
4. W.D.P., 29 April; W.D.P., 11 October 1922.
5. Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Council, Mins., May 1926.

the immediacy of the question for them, displayed a sharper awareness of the issues at stake. The grain porters already mentioned were motivated primarily by the fear of unemployment and the demand for job security.

Often, even before 1921, the defensive conception of the struggle was fully explicit. In the view of the Bristol railwaymen's strike committee in October 1919 their struggle was essentially in defence of wage levels and trade union organisation. This was made clear in a statement issued to other workers.

'The Prime Minister has said there must be a 'better land fit for heroes' to live in'. 'Does he make the land fit for heroes by forcing down railwaymen's wages? ... Your wages will be reduced next'.[1] After the strike was settled, the committee attempted to draw the lessons from it: 'All they could do,' they were reported as saying, 'was to go back to work and build up their organisation in readiness for the next attempt (to force down their wages). They had only fought a defensive battle.'[2]

This form of trade union response was quite compatible with an acceptance of capitalism. Nevertheless, there was evidence of a considerable radicalisation among workers; there were signs of this well before the war ended. The desire for greater social justice and an improved lot for the working class was given great impetus by the sacrifices demanded of workers during the war and the feeling that these should be adequately rewarded. The sense of inequality was greatly heightened by the unequal sacrifices demanded of the different classes during the war. Even the ultra-patriotic Tillett could be found on occasions demanding the conscription of wealth as well as of Labour.

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1. W.D.P., 3 October 1919.
2. W.D.P., 7 October 1919.

As peace approached, an increasing amount of thought was given to the kind of world that would emerge from the holocaust. Those who had opposed the war were anxious that there should be no return to the kind of society in which such a war was possible. Those who had entered willingly into the war effort demanded that their sacrifices be rewarded. This was a feeling very skilfully played upon by Coalition politicians during the 1918 election. Lloyd George's subsequent failure to honour his promises contributed further to the growing radicalisation. So too did the profiteering in foodstuffs at a time of general shortages. These frustrations found expression in the statements from the railwaymen's strike committee:

> 'Is this the way to recompense Labour's sacrifice during the war? You know the scandal of profiteering.
>
> Brow-beating the poorest workers is worse than a scandal. It is a crime. Insist on fair and equal treatment for all.'[1]

The post-war mood was one of impatience. Attempts by union officials to steer conflict into institutionalised channels came under severe pressure. Bevin was more successful than most in containing his members' aspirations within manageable limits, through his use of the Shaw Inquiry to win a 16s. per day minimum wage. But on other issues the officials of the Dockers' Union were less successful in avoiding strike action. Together with this impatience, workers manifested a markedly reduced capacity to accept injustice and arbitrariness with the same resignation as before. Thus in April 1919 after a dock worker had been sent to prison by local magistrates for one month for the theft of two apples from the docks, the whole of the labour force at Bristol and

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1. W.D.P., 3 October 1919.

Avonmouth docks downed tools in protest. It was only after the intervention of the Lord Mayor, who secured the man's release on bail, pending appeal, that the men were persuaded to return to work.[1]

Frustration, impatience, a certain cynicism towards the established political system, mixed with hope for change contributed to the making of a fluid political situation after the war. But, at least in Bristol, this mood did not crystallize into a more generalized, sustained, political challenge to the capitalist system which underpinned the injustices and exploitation. Some groups of workers did turn to radical solutions to their own problems. Thus the Bristol miners voted overwhelmingly for the Sankey proposals, and continued to voice the demand for nationalisation of the mines.[2] This question was especially critical in Bristol where the mines, under private ownership and forced to compete with more efficient undertakings elsewhere, could not sustain the wage levels paid in the larger coalfields. The demand for nationalisation was therefore closely linked with the policy of national standardization of wages.

The link between economic circumstances and political responses was important because no two groups of workers were alike. The only other group of workers to pursue seriously the nationalisation demand were the railwaymen. Skilled engineering workers tended to ignore this question, concentrating much more on the restoration of pre-war craft privileges, and insofar as they took up more general issues they were concerned with questions of workshop control. Their response to the employers' proposals, in 1920, for a system of payments by results, reflected their own specific brand of radicalism. They were not

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1. W.D.P., 12 April 1919.
2. B.T.M., 11 April 1919.

prepared, an A.S.E. mass meeting resolved, 'to accept payment by results in any shape or form until the members have a full share of the administration of industry.'[1] Furthermore, they were not prepared, they said, 'to consider any system to enable employers and dividend hunters to obtain extra profits by lowering to a further degree the status of the operative' until the employers agreed to accept responsibility for all unemployment in the industry, and agreed to merge all war wages, bonuses, and percentages into basic time rates. The first two conditions were an explicit challenge which struck at basic tenets of capitalism - unrestricted managerial authority, and the ability of employers to solve problems of profitability by rationalisation and the creation of unemployment. But such an articulate challenge was unique, and even those A.S.E. members who supported it appear to have had little commitment, for, during 1920 and 1921, piecework agreements were signed with local employers without them having to agree to these conditions.[2] Moreover, in relating almost exclusively to the problems faced by skilled engineering workers, this approach failed to achieve the necessary level of generalisation to enable it to serve as a launching pad for a challenge to the political, social and economic system on a wider front.

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1. On the other hand, the A.S.E. No. I branch in Bristol, in July 1914, 'strongly urged' the Bristol City Council to take over the ownership and control of the Bristol Tramways Company. This resolution was passed just a few weeks after the A.S.E. members at the Company's Brislington vehicle building works had been involved in a bitter dispute with the company over new working rules. Municipal ownership of the tramways was seen by this union branch as a means of providing a more favourable climate for trade unions than private ownership, despite the fact that the dockers had, in recent years, been involved in disputes with the port employers when the Docks Committee of the City Council, which owned Bristol and Avonmouth docks, had sided with the employers. (See above, pp. 37-44). It was felt by many trades unionists that the City Council was more susceptible to the political pressure that could be applied by the trade unions through the Labour Party or by other means, and was thus more likely to recognise and negotiate with the trade unions representing the workers employed in municipal undertakings.
(A.S.E., Bristol No. I Branch, Mins., July 1914).
2. Engineering & Allied Employers (West of England) Association, Agreements, 1919 and 1920.

One of the basic features, therefore, of post-war working class consciousness was its fragmentation, even at the level of the most advanced militants. This alone would have ensured that workers' demands were mediated primarily through the trades unions. The increased strength of the unions, both in terms of membership and in terms of their ability to paralyse large sectors of industry, reinforced this trend. An awareness on the part of many groups of workers of the weapons at their disposal was a boost to their militancy, and it was in this manner that they manifested their presence upon the political scene. Their demands, however, were essentially sectional. Yet this did not preclude the expression of feelings of solidarity from other workers not involved in a particular struggle, based on a militant class consciousness. The railwaymen in 1919 thanked other unions for their assistance; they realised, the strike committee said, 'that our fight is theirs, and they are determined to render every possible help, as our defeat would be their defeat. The motto is, 'Unity is Strength.'[1] After the war the solidarity which had characterised the industrial struggles of 1911 and 1912 re-emerged, and with a much broader base. The N.U.G.W. branch called on the National Federation of General Workers in 1919 to declare a strike in sympathy with the railwaymen.[2] The Trades Council as central co-ordinating body of the local movement, took on a new significance, being called upon to organise support, both financial and moral, for member unions involved in disputes.

But there were very few sympathy strikes. This does not detract from the strength of the spontaneous feelings of solidarity. Rather it points to the fact that in the post-war world, when the confrontations were much sharper than they had been before the war, and the stakes much

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1. W.D.P., 2 October 1919.
2. W.D.P., 6 October 1919.

higher, there was an awareness of the crucial role that the official trade union structures and trade union federations would play in any conflict, and an appreciation of the need for a certain level of discipline. But at the same time, whilst such a development might appear more threatening to the Government and employers, it rarely resulted in any action, for the union leaderships were as fearful of the consequences of class wide action as were their opponents. Indeed, the effect of the policies of institutionalisation of conflict was to weaken many of the bonds of solidarity, and to set the union officials ever more firmly against spontaneous expressions of sympathy, since these cut across union policies and endangered relationships with employers.

But it is important to note here that this was only a tendency; thus on the docks the union officials had, by the end of the war, travelled far along the road of conciliation and arbitration and of commitment to controlling their members' spontaneous feelings in the interest of stable union-employer relations. But the dockers themselves, particularly in a situation of sharpening class tensions, frequently showed a cavalier disregard for the constraints imposed by their membership of the union; their sympathy with other sections was in no way deadened by their union's attachment to policies and procedures which denied such feelings. Nevertheless, the relative scarcity of solidarity strike action testifies to the fact that when workers felt that they could not act on major issues without the resources of the union behind them, the policies of their officials assumed a crucial importance.

The contradiction between sectionalism, enshrined in the trade union bureaucracies, and the desire for a united class response to employers and the Government, was embodied in the Triple Alliance.

Bagwell has shown that, in the upper echelons of the Labour movement, the alliance was a confirmation rather than a denial of entrenched sectionalism.[1] Each of the main partners to it - dockers and transport workers, miners and railwaymen - had their own separate aims. In their negotiations with union officials, Government ministers skilfully played on these differences, thereby emphasising them. But while at this level the alliance foundered on the rocks of sectionalism, it nevertheless embodied the hopes of large numbers of workers for a united front of the forces of organised labour. The scenes which greeted the promulgation of the Alliance, at a mass meeting in Bristol in 1914, demonstrated its importance for the rank and file. The same enthusiasm re-emerged after the war. The fact that the Alliance never effectively functioned did not mean that it was an irrelevance at this level. Bristol railwaymen were convinced in 1919 that they had the 'full support of the transport workers and the miners in the Triple Alliance'.[2] During the miners' strike a year later the railwaymen reciprocated, holding a mass meeting to pledge support for the sympathy action that they expected to be called by the Alliance.[3]

From the point of view of these workers, the tragedy of the Triple Alliance was that so many hopes were pinned on it, for when it faced its greatest test, in the 'Black Friday' crisis of April 1921, it collapsed ignominiously. Its contradictions were revealed. Sectionalism at the top proved an insuperable obstacle to united action. But the readiness of railwaymen and dockers to take action in support of the miners was emphasised. Moreover, by April 1921 the need for such action had been much increased by the fact that the unions were facing a severe

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1. P. Bagwell, 'The Triple Industrial Alliance, 1913-22' in Briggs & Saville, ed. Essays in Labour History, 1886-1923, (London 1971), pp.96-128.
2. B.T.M., 27 September 1919.
3. B.T.M., 20 October 1920.

counter-offensive. Decontrol of the mines and railways was followed by attacks on wages and conditions. The issue was no longer whether the unions could act together to bring about reforms, but whether they could show a united response to an attempt to annul some of the gains they had made over the previous period.

The whole of the local trades union movement was aware of the dangers. A letter from Trades Council secretary Parker to the W.D.P. on the eve of Black Friday, captured the prevailing mood. 'The present critical industrial situation', he wrote, 'is caused by an attempt on the part of organised capitalism to establish a right of unlimited plunder. It must be resisted at all costs, for it is not only an attack on the miners, but the beginning of an offensive against the standard of life of the whole community.'[1] Much the same thing had been said at the railwaymen's mass meeting on 3rd April, when it was decided to support the miners by strike action.[2] A Trades Council meeting, attended by 104 delegates, unanimously expressed its support.[3] There seems little doubt that this support would have been translated into action had the call come from the centre. A local committee representative of the Triple Alliance unions was established to co-ordinate plans for a strike, and when that strike was called off, disappointment was general. At a mass meeting held on the Sunday, local officials were as critical of their Executives as were the rank and file.[4] But loyalty to the Executives' decisions was ensured. Only the dockers showed any inclination to resist. In May, when a steamship arrived burning German coal, the port was brought to a standstill for three days while the dockers blacked the ship.[5] The intervention of their

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1. W.D.P., 16 April 1921.
2. W.D.P., 4 April 1921.
3. W.D.P., 9 April 1921; B.T.H., ibid.
4. W.D.P., 18 April 1921.
5. W.D.P., 3-4 May 1921.

officials persuaded the men to return to work. Funds were collected for the miners through the Trades Council, but in general the miners were left isolated, and the unions suffered a total defeat.

III) Bourgeois class consciousness

Black Friday was the culmination of the sharpening class tensions of the immediate post-war years. Almost as soon as the Armistice was signed the language of class conflict again began to figure prominently in the pronouncements of the spokesmen of the employing classes. Gone was the optimism and conciliatory tone of the later war years, when whitleyism and the B.A.I.R. had seemed to offer an alternative means of coping with the Labour threat. In its place there was a growing determination to have a showdown with the forces of organised Labour. Thus the B.T.M. wrote of the miners' strike in 1920:

'A small portion of the community are preparing to starve the rest into submission to a demand which is so unreasonable that even Mr. Smillie has abandoned it. The wild men have prepared to fight, and they must be beaten - that is the universal feeling in business circles in Bristol, where there is a disposition to say that it is high time the question of who shall rule the country was fought out and settled, for it is not only a question of wages and output.'[1]

In their direct relations with union officials many members of the employing class were prepared to continue the incorporation strategy, but even this became a less attractive proposition as those officials, under pressure from their members, were pushed into leading struggles.

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1. B.T.M., 16 October 1920.

Some of the leaders of the Reconstruction movement were still, in 1919, peddling their ideas for industrial peace. Johnston was among them.[1] But after the war few employers were prepared to entertain the use of the Whitleyist strategy on a wider front.

A number of factors had contributed to this change. On a world scale the Russian revolution and post-war upheavals throughout Europe seemed to augur an upsurge of revolutionary movements everywhere. The Whitleyist movement had developed very largely in response to these events. But it had been based partly on the hopes engendered by the wartime collaboration of trade union leaders in measures to curtail strikes, and the participation of the Labour party in the Coalition Government. It was an attempt to encourage such trends, render them permanent, and steer the Labour movement into safe, non-socialist channels. The new Labour party constitution and programme, and the break with the Coalition, seemed to shatter any hope of success for this strategy. So too did the promulgation of ideas of a direct actionist strategy within the movement by some prominent trade union officials. That this should occur at a time when the unions were at a peak of membership, when the forces of the trade union movement were being consolidated, and when trade union members were ever more assertive in their demands, seemed to threaten not only the economic position of the employers, but the whole constitution. The visible evidence of decline in Britain's world trading position and the loss of her competitive advantages served to increase the urgency of the situation from the employers' point of view.

Just as the wartime Coalition had been an expression of solidarity in the face of the German threat, so the post-war Coalition was the result of similar feelings of being under seige. The difference was that

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1. Johnston presented papers to Manchester Chamber of Trade, and to British Association in 1919, both of which were issued as pamphlets.

in the latter the Labour party was absent, and now represented the enemy of property, whilst the Coalition represented the forces of property who had sunk their differences in order to present a common front.[1] Class conflict was thereby acknowledged as the central issue of politics. The Coalition spirit was enormously powerful in Bristol. It continued after the war as an 'anti-socialist force' which appealed explicitly to the middle class voter, in both general and local elections. The greatest fear of both Liberals and Tories - and in the local elections this included both Asquithian and Lloyd George wings of the party - was that a divided middle class vote would let in the Labour candidate. Accordingly, in local elections after 1919 there were no contests between Liberal and Tory candidates, and indeed, the party labels themselves were dropped in favour of the titles 'anti-socialist', 'coalition', and later 'citizen' candidates.

In local politics the Coalition played on the fears of the middle class voter about the expense of the reforms proposed by Labour. But undoubtedly the greatest and most immediate fear was of the trade unions. Just as in 1911 the forces of the state were called upon to intervene ever more directly in industrial disputes. During the railway strike and during the Black Friday crisis, the local authority acted on behalf of the state in setting up recruiting stations for volunteer labour. The Civil Commissioner, appointed by the Government, was responsible for keeping services moving during the Black Friday crisis.[2] Previously, even during the pre-war unrest, the recruitment of strike breakers had been left to individual employers or their federations. After the war, the state itself assumed direct responsibility for this task, and the

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1. e.g., W.D.P., 3 December 1918; The Co. Lib. candidate in Bristol North (E.S. Gange) informed an audience that the nation faced 'Important problems which would be required to be dealt with by businessmen, who were accustomed to handling large questions.'
2. W.D.P., 16 April 1921.

middle and upper classes rallied to its side. Thus the Chamber of Commerce, which on previous occasions had sought to act as mediator, and so had scrupulously fostered an image of impartiality, now abandoned this stance and helped in strike-breaking efforts.[1] During the railway strike it was reported that an Admiral of the Fleet and an M.P. were driving trains in Bristol.[2] Previously strike breakers had been recruited from non-unionised sectors of the working class, and the middle class had not been directly involved. After the war, such sources were not as readily available. The unions had enormously increased their own membership, whilst the unemployed, mainly ex-servicemen, refused to participate in strike-breaking.[3] Moreover, the very effort of strike-breaking had itself taken on a symbolic significance for the middle and upper classes, and it was important in terms of their own consciousness that they should themselves participate in that effort. It was a gesture of resistance by a whole class that felt itself to be threatened.

IV) The Labour Movement and Class Conflict

Black Friday, to the satisfaction of the middle and upper classes, seemed finally to settle the debate in the Labour movement about the use of direct action for political purposes. In retrospect their fears of the direct actionists seem absurdly exaggerated, for none of the trade union leaders who advocated strike action in pursuit of political aims could be described as revolutionary. Their conception was essentially limited; direct action should be used in pursuit of particular reforms, or to modify a particular Government policy, not to overthrow that

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1. Chamber of Commerce, Council, Mins., passim.
2. W.D.P., 2 October 1919.
3. B.T.M., 27 September 1919.

Government. At the level of the rank and file it is much more difficult to pin down just what hopes and expectations were pinned to direct action.[1] No evidence has been found of a revolutionary political consciousness in Bristol. But the debate over direct action or constitutionalism was not simply an argument over strategy within the upper echelons of the movement. It was a reflection of the fact, noted earlier, that in the immediate post-war period workers looked primarily to their trade union strength as an agency of change, and not to the Labour Party or to Parliament, and that a large section of the leadership of the movement set itself the task of steering trade unionists into established constitutional channels.

The direct action debate was not simply a split between trade unionists and the political wing of the movement. Much of the I.L.P. could be found on the side of direct action, although Ayles placed himself firmly in the constitutionalist camp. The local leadership of N.U.B.S.O. was continually urging, through the union journal, that support for the Labour Party through the ballot box was the only solution for workers' problems.[2] Bevin was cautious. He denounced the resolution passed at a Labour conference in 1919 as irresponsible, and claimed it was the result of outside interference in the movement.[3] Yet the dividing line was not distinct because it was not static. Thus Bevin was one of the instigators of the Council of Action in 1920, when the threat of war with Russia inspired a new unity within the movement.[4] In Bristol a local Council of Action was set up

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1. The difficulty here stems from the lack of source material. The local press did not report rank and file feelings, concentrating largely on statements from officials. There is a lack of good branch records for this period. It has therefore been necessary to try to interpret the feelings of rank and file workers from their actions and from the demands which they made.
2. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, January 1920.
3. W.D.P., 14 July 1919.
4. A. Bullock, op.cit., p.135.

representative of the unions, local Labour Parties, the I.L.P., and ex-servicemen's organisations, and held mass meetings at three points in the city to pledge support for a strike to stop involvement in the Russo-Polish war.[1] In the face of the threat of renewed war the unity of the movement had been a decisive factor, and the policy of direct action appeared to have been vindicated.

But the relationship between the political leadership of the movement and strike action was problematic. This was revealed particularly in situations where a strike took on a wider significance through its becoming a confrontation with the state, and the distinction between political and industrial action became blurred. In the Labour Party there was undoubted sympathy for the causes of the various strikers, but there was also a feeling of being outside the industrial struggle. The Council of Action united the movement because it was not an issue which was exclusive to one side or the other. The I.L.P. was most acutely aware of its isolation from the trade union struggle, although after the war there were efforts to remedy the situation. In a leaflet issued by the Bristol branch in 1919 headed Trade Unionism in Danger, it drew attention to the threat to the right to strike from Government legislation, and sought to link its own wartime experiences with the situation currently facing the unions:

'... the circle within which strikes are disputes between employer and employed is rapidly narrowing, and the liberty to combine and act in defence of collective interests is being steadily undermined. This follows the attack on individual liberty which has been made through war legislation, and means that the Bureaucrats and Militarists now see only the trade unions in their way.'[2] But, as if to emphasise their

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1. B.T.M., 23 August 1920; W.D.P., ibid.
2. Bristol I.L.P., Trade Unionism in Danger, (Bristol 1919).

own distance from the unions, and its inability to offer any concrete leadership in the struggles actually taking place, the leaflet put forward the only solution as being a future socialist transformation. Thus, the struggle for socialism was abstracted from the day to day battles of trade unionists.

When strikes occurred that involved confrontations with the state, there was considerable unease within the I.L.P. that the situation could easily go beyond the bounds of constitutionality. The conflict between that fear and their sympathy with the trade union cause was resolved, by Ayles at least, by placing the blame for the situation on the Government's shoulders, and also by attempting to intervene in an ameliorative capacity. During the 1919 railway strike Ayles was in Conway, North Wales, but set out to walk to Bristol in order, as he explained to the B.T.M., 'that I might do what little I can to prevent the provocative action of the Government having the disastrous social and moral effect it appears likely to have.'[1] Ayles applied his pacifist principles to class conflict as well as to international affairs, and constantly preached the necessity of using the ballot box to bring about change.[2]

During the Black Friday crisis, however, the issue at stake was not whether the unions should use their power to bring about political change, but whether they could present a common front to the threat to wages and conditions. Yet even in 1921 there was unease within the movement that the threatened general strike which involved the state was unconstitutional and immoral. The 'responsible' leaders in particular were appalled by the turn of events. Among these was A. Sennington, who had been elected third Labour alderman in 1920.[3] When,

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1. B.T.M., 2 October 1919.
2. See above, pp. 60; 137.
3. See Biographical Appendix, below pp. 401.

in April 1921 there was a sharp polarisation between the forces of Labour and those of Capital, Sennington attempted to cling to the ideas of the 'national interest' and corporate solidarity which he had supported so strongly during the war. When the Civil Commissioner began to recruit voluntary Labour, and the Lord Mayor called a meeting of prominent citizens to plan the maintenance of services, Sennington protested, not at the involvement of the Corporation in such activities, but at their failure to invite the Labour Party to participate. 'They were all citizens of Bristol,' he was reported as saying, 'and were directly and seriously concerned in anything that was of vital interest to the city ... It was not playing for unity (sic) for invitations to go to one class of the community to the exclusion of others. The man or woman who dared to say that it was urged on the people of the nation to strike at this time was an idiot or a fool. They were not out for that kind of thing, but they were placed in a difficulty, and if unity was to be obtained the working classes must be remembered.'[1] Thus Sennington earned his ticket of admission to political honours. In 1923 he was elected by a predominantly Coalition council as second Labour Lord Mayor.[2]

V) The Building of a Political Party

We shall return to the theme of the relationship between the Labour movement and class conflict later, but at this point it is necessary to show what processes were going on inside the movement after 1918. The 1918 general election had established the Labour Party as the main opposition group, but its gains did not place it within reach of municipal power. One lesson that was drawn within the party after the

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1. W.D.P., 16 April 1921.
2. W.D.P., 10 November 1923.

election was that they would have done better if they had possessed the necessary electoral machinery. It was a constant complaint of Labour candidates that the election had been sprung upon them before they had had adequate time to prepare. Accordingly, after the election, the major task of party members was seen as the building up of individual membership and the fashioning of an efficient electoral machine.

The abolition of the L.R.C. had left the movement with an organisational vacuum at its centre, although the Trades Council still functioned in a co-ordinating role. But under the new constitution the Trades Council had lost the central position it had occupied within the local movement. Its political functions were taken over by the Borough Labour Party, not formed until February 1919, based on delegations from the constituency and ward organisations and the I.L.P., and also from affiliated unions.[1] Unlike the L.R.C., the B.L.P. was not concerned with the actual organising of election work; its task was the discussion and formulation of policy, for which purpose it began to organise half-yearly conferences.[2] It was quite distinct from the Trades Council, but there was inevitably some overlap between the two and in 1920 they were fused into the Bristol Trades and Labour Council, which employed a full-time secretary, E. H. Parker.[3] Whilst this fusion apparently derived from an acknowledgment of the falseness of the distinction between political and trade union action, on another level this split was confirmed by that fusion, for it became possible for the Trades Council to curb discussion on political issues at its delegate meetings by referring all such matters to the B.L.P.

The creation of individual membership organisations was not achieved overnight. The primary unit in the new mass party was to be the ward

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1. I.L.P., Mins., February 1919.
2. These were held in March and September of each year, from the early 1920s.
3. Bristol Trades Council, Recommendations of T.C. & B.L.P. Fusion Committee; I.L.P., Mins., July 1919; February-April 1920; For E. H. Parker, See Biographical Appendix, p. 400.

party, and in many wards it proved difficult to create a Labour Party in the early years. This placed the I.L.P., which had long possessed a ward organisation, in a key position in the party. In the 1919 municipal elections the Labour Party contested 15 out of 23 wards, more than ever before; in at least 12 of those wards there had been some I.L.P. organisations previously.[1] The problem of creating ward parties was precisely the problem of recruiting an individual membership, and the I.L.P. could only provide the beginnings of those. In the East the task was facilitated by the employment of a part-time secretary and organiser, H. E. Rogers. He recalls that he spent the summers of 1919 and 1920 holding open-air meetings and canvassing. 'I collected,' he says, 'from the unions, the names and addresses of their members living in the constituency, and personally canvassed those members. I was able to ascertain whether they would join the Labour Party, whether at an election time they were prepared to show a poster; whether they would be prepared to do any canvassing or distributing in the streets in which they lived, and whether they would be prepared to do writing of envelopes, etc. When an election took place I was able to have every street in the constituency covered by someone or other.'[2]

At the 1920 Annual Meeting of the East C.L.P. Rogers was able to report an improvement in ward organisation.[3] The minutes of the St. George West ward in the division show that in 1921 its organisation was greatly improved by adopting a scheme on the lines of one that was already in existence in the St. Phillips area, which consisted of the 'appointment of a Polling District Secretary in charge of a committee of members representing, if possible, every street in their respective districts. This would spread the work and make for greater all-round

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1. I.L.P., General Secretary's Reports, passim.
2. H. E. Rogers, Conversation with the author. The tape recordings of this conversation have been deposited in the University of Bristol Library. H. E. Rogers, now aged 80, is still an active member of the Bristol South East Labour Party; See Biographical Appendix, p.401.
3. Bristol East C.L.P., 1920 Annual General Meeting, Mins.

efficiency.'[1] The organisation of women was taken up as a special problem by the East C.L.P.; the St. George West ward party set up its own Women's Section in 1922.[2] Elsewhere, however, this posed problems and in 1923 and again in 1925, autumn campaigns were launched to stimulate women's interest.[3] By 1925 Women's sections had been formed in the Somerset and St. George East Wards, and in that year, it was reported, 'At last a Women's Section has been formed in Easton.'[4]

The pace of development, then, was uneven, even in the best organised of the local C.L.P.s, the East. A stable, functioning party machine was not created in 1918, but took several years to fashion. Moreover, even in the early years, it was not a question of steady and continuous progress. The membership in the East, which in 1919 had stood at 200, had increased to 830 in 1924, but in 1925 slipped back to 584.[5] The East C.L.P. had certain advantages in this respect. There was a strong I.L.P. tradition in the area, and the seat was regarded as a possible gain. It thus attracted trade union support for candidates. Bateman, who contested in 1918 and 1922, was sponsored by both the N.U.R. and the I.L.P. His successor, Baker, was Assistant General Secretary of the U.P.W.[6] Such sponsorship provided the East C.L.P. with financial support which freed the secretary and agent from the necessity to spend the bulk of his time in money-raising activities, thus allowing him to concentrate on organisational work.[7]

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1. St. George West ward Labour Party, Mins., April 1921.
2. St. George West ward Labour Party, Mins., September 1922.
3. W.D.P., 25 September 1923; Bristol East C.L.P., Mins., July 1925.
4. Bristol East C.L.P., GC. Mins., December 1925.
5. Bristol East C.L.P., Annual Meeting Mins., passim.
6. Bristol East C.L.P., GC. Mins., April 1923; W.D.P., 28 April 1923.
7. For the social complexion of local constituencies, see below pp. 207-211.

The other local C.L.P.s do not seem to have developed their organisation to anything like the same extent. Membership figures suggest that the Central party was consistently weak, and the North was only marginally stronger. In the latter there was no full-time agent, and preparations for elections were undertaken by ad hoc committees.[1] The South, with support from the T.G.W.U. in particular, fared better, but in the West no C.L.P. was established until the mid-1920s. The General Council of the Bristol West party was not constituted until 1926, and previously the Labour Party presence in the division had been limited to ward groups in Westbury, Horfield and Avonmouth.[2] No candidate was fielded in general elections in the West until 1924.

As the election machinery was developed it began to show results. (The increase in Labour representation will be analysed in more detail below, pp.206-208.) But success brought new problems in its wake, including that of how to hold the growing Labour group on the Council and Guardians accountable to the party activists. Attempts to exercise control were conducted partly through the B.L.P., and partly through the C.L.P.s and ward parties. The I.L.P. had been largely responsible for providing Labour's municipal programme, and therefore considered itself to be the guardian of that policy. In November 1919 Ayles warned the central branch of the necessity for vigilance. 'As the forward wing of the Labour Party,' he argued, 'we should endeavour to keep the Labour Party and Labour councillors up to their municipal programme and promises.'[3] Through the B.L.P., therefore, the I.L.P. sponsored a resolution calling for a monthly meeting to discuss municipal policy 'at which Labour councillors should be present and give

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1. Bristol North C.L.P., GC. Mins., passim.
2. Bristol West C.L.P., GC. Mins., passim.
3. I.L.P., Mins., November 1919.

an account of their work.'[1] The B.L.P. adopted the proposal, yet the next month there were complaints that the conference had not taken place.

At ward level there was clearly uneasiness at the tendency for councillors, once elected, to ignore the party. In May 1921 the St. George West party discussed a proposal that at least one of the councillors or Guardians from the ward should be invited to attend each monthly meeting to give a report on their work.[2] This, it was said, would keep the members in close touch with their elected representatives, and give them a deeper insight into local government affairs, and would also 'tend to put more life into ward meetings.' But public representatives were consistently absent from ward meetings. When Baker took over the candidacy in 1923 he instituted a review of party organisation in the division, and the General Council was made aware of this problem. It demanded that its 'various public representatives should pay some personal attention to their respective wards.'[3] Yet even the General Council itself could not be sure that councillors and Guardians would attend to report on their activities.

For the wards, this was not only a question of internal party democracy. The ward parties in the East developed a very efficient electoral machinery, but this would only be called into operation in the period preceding the Guardians elections in April and the municipal elections in November. For the rest of the time that machine had little function. Yet if the organisation were not kept functioning the whole year the resulting apathy would impair its efficiency at election times. As early as October 1919 the I.L.P. was complaining about the apathy of Labour Party members, and urging its members to play a greater part in

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1. I.L.P., Mins., Nov. 1919.
2. St. George West ward Labour Party, Mins., May 1921.
3. Bristol East C.L.P., GC. Mins., June 1923.

Labour Party activities.[1] A number of possible solutions were tried. The St. George West ward began various social activities in 1921.[2] But the greatest weakness of the ward parties was their lack of political education, and the low level of their propaganda effort arising out of their too heavy concentration on election organisation. Without educational activity at ward meetings there was little to sustain and guide the work of the party in periods between elections. The demand that public representatives should attend ward meetings sprang from the feeling that they should contribute to the education of other party members.

The problem in the Labour Party after 1918 was partly that political education and propaganda work had been hived off to the I.L.P. The 1918 constitution had forced the Labour Party and the I.L.P. to redefine their relationship, locally as well as nationally. The I.L.P. could no longer claim to be the movement's political wing, providing not only its policies but also its electoral organisation, for both were now embraced by the Labour Party itself. Nor was the I.L.P. any more the individual membership section of the party. The problem of reorientation for the I.L.P. was not one that could be resolved at meetings of party executives, for the situations in the various localities were diverse and complex. The so-called Glasgow solution, whereby the I.L.P. concentrated on education and propaganda, and the Labour Party on election work, was tried in several areas, including Bristol.[3] During 1919 and 1920 the central branch of the I.L.P. was wrestling with this problem, and a special meeting with the B.L.P. in December 1920 agreed to adopt the Glasgow solution, thus assuring the I.L.P. of a continuing role within the movement.[4]

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1. I.L.P., Mins., October 1919.
2. St. George West Ward Labour Party, Mins., April 1921.
3. R. E. Douse, Left in the Centre, (1966), ch.3.
4. I.L.P., Mins., December 1920.

The I.L.P. launched itself into its new role with alacrity. During 1921 and 1922 open-air propaganda work was stepped up, and these years saw the I.L.P. reach a pitch of frenetic activity, perhaps unprecedented in its history.[1] There was a national revival in activity and membership at this time, and the picture was the same in Bristol. From the 501 members in December 1917, the branch had gorwn to 684 by 1921, and continued rising.[2] But this picture must be placed in perspective. Although membership was increasing on paper, heavy unemployment was taking its toll of members' subscriptions. Of the 684 members in 1921, only 471 were fully paid up. The existence of a large paper membership was felt most acutely at ward level, where the organisation languished. The problems of ward groups of the I.L.P. were compounded by the tendency to concentrate solely on propaganda, most of which was centrally organised at Branch level.

Yet despite the I.L.P.'s enthusiasm for its new role, the demarcation of functions agreed with the Labour Party was unrealistic. It was not possible for I.L.P. members to extricate themselves entirely from Labour Party electoral work in order to concentrate on propaganda. Indeed, as the most active and committed of Labour Party workers, at least in the first few years after 1918, the I.L.P. members inevitably carried a large part of the electoral work. The officers of many of the local Labour Party's constituent bodies, particularly the Bristol East C.L.P., and the Bristol B.L.P., continued, in the main, to be members of the I.L.P., and this remained the case even when the Labour Party developed its ward parties based on individual membership.

Nevertheless, the composition of the various C.L.P.s' executive committees was changed to reflect the growing importance of the ward

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1. I.L.P., Mins., 1921-22, passim.
2. ibid.

parties. The East C.L.P.'s Executive Committee was reconstituted four times in five years until in 1923 the party settled for the situation where the I.L.P. had to share four out of 22 places with other affiliated societies,[1] in 1918 it had been entitled to five out of 16 places. But the officers of the party continued to be predominantly I.L.P. members. On the B.L.P., Ayles was President until 1923.[2] Among the councillors there was the same trend. Of the 16 Labour councillors in 1919, 12 were I.L.P. members.[3] This assured the I.L.P. of a continuing influence within the Labour Party. But the I.L.P.'s problem was that so large a portion of Labour Party work depended on its members that they became totally absorbed within the larger organisation, and their activity on behalf of the I.L.P. was consequently reduced. Very few I.L.P. councillors or holders of Labour Party office attended I.L.P. branch meetings, and increasingly their membership of the I.L.P. became more of a symbolic, almost sentimental attachment, rather than an active political commitment.

The I.L.P., for its part, showed no inclination to act merely as the Labour Party's propagandist arm. Dowse has argued that in areas where membership remained predominantly working class, such as Scotland and Lancashire, the I.L.P. continued to function as an electoral organisation, whereas in areas where there had been a large influx of middle class radicals during the war, the I.L.P. slipped easily into its propagandist role.[4] Bristol does not fit either of these patterns, for there had been an influx of middle class radicals during the war, yet the local I.L.P. still retained an electoral commitment. As late as 1927 it was reported that in Redland, a thoroughly middle class ward,

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., GC Mins., March 1923.
2. I.L.P., Mins., passim.
3. I.L.P., Mins., April 1920.
4. Dowse, op.cit., Ch. 3.

the I.L.P. group had taken on full responsibility for contesting the ward.[1] In parliamentary elections, too, the I.L.P. continued to operate in support of the candidature of Ayles in Bristol North. He had been adopted in 1919 after his release from prison,[2] and, particularly in 1922, much of the energy of the branch were channelled into the election effort, to compensate for a rather weak Labour Party organisation in the division.

The demarcation of function thus proved unworkable. On the Labour Party's side, its own lack of education and propaganda activity tended to depress the general level of interest and enthusiasm of its individual members who were not also members of the I.L.P., and there was a growing realisation among party workers that the Labour Party could not neglect this side of its activities indefinitely. Yet whilst the Labour Party was in the process of building its organisation the problem could be pushed into the background. Labour Party members who were also members of the I.L.P. felt little conflict between the two until the later 1920s, although this was mainly because less and less importance was attached to their I.L.P. membership.

At the same time there were other bodies within the movement which were making a claim to be involved in education and propaganda activity. The N.C.L.C. was, as yet, not well established, but the Co-operative Society was beginning to take a more active interest in the political work of the movement. During 1917 the Co-op Political Committee was set up to supervise Co-op political action, a symptom of the turn towards socialist politics within the Co-operative movement. The Political Committee did not immediately affiliate to the L.R.C., but many of its local Guilds and Educational Councils affiliated to the

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1. B.L.W., 8 October 1927.
2. I.L.P., Mins., June-July 1919.

C.L.P.s, and in December 1919, the Political Committee decided to affiliate to the B.L.P.[1] Its main work within the Labour Party was the promotion of Co-op candidates at municipal elections, but, together with the Education Committee and the Joint full-time secretary of both, A. W. Cox, educational classes and propaganda meetings were instituted.[2] The problem of education was not a marginal issue, but part of the whole process of building a self-reliant, independent, political party, with a distinctive ideology. The relative weakness in the provisions for socialist education within the Bristol Labour movement was an important factor in setting the tone of that movement. The weakness can be illustrated in other ways, particularly with reference to the education provided by external agencies. An enduring feature of the Bristol movement was its connections with religion.

The early Labour leaders in Bristol had tended to be drawn from the milieu of the chapels and brotherhoods and saw socialism in terms of a moral crusade. The high moral tone of the I.L.P., for example, was reflected in its practice of singing hymns at political meetings, in the holding of Church parades, jointly with the Church Socialist League, on May Day,[3] and indeed in the very arguments that were used by it to advance the socialist case. Before 1914 the I.L.P. had within its ranks several Anglican clergymen, although this relationship was severely strained during the war. After the war the Quaker influence was much more evident within the I.L.P.

The war has traditionally been seen as an important stage in the decline of Nonconformity. After the war, chapel congregations declined.

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1. For this information, I am grateful to Mr. E. Wall, B.C.S. Training Officer, for permission to consult a paper on the history of the B.C.S.
2. B.C.S./P.C., Mins., passim.
   For A. W. Cox, see Biographical Index, p. 397.
3. I.L.P., Mins., April 1914.

Yet, notwithstanding the adverse effects of the war on Nonconformity, the links between the Labour movement and the various chapels in Bristol remained strong even after the war.

Many of the leading members of the Labour Party in the 1920s were attached in some way to various chapels. Miss Tothill, a prominent I.L.P. member and councillor was a Quaker,[1] as was Ayles. Sheppard was a Methodist lay preacher,[2] together with Councillor Burgess, an official of the T.G.W.U.[3] Whitefield's allegiance was to Spiritualism,[4] whilst Parker[5] had Free Church connections. Councillor Milton was active in the Redfield Brotherhood and the St. George Adult School,[6] and Bateman[7] and Councillor Mrs. Pheysey[8] were also connected with the Adult Schools. The church parade on May Day was abandoned by the I.L.P. during the war, but the tradition was carried on at least until 1931 by the East G.L.P., where the party retained a distinct religious tone.

The Brotherhoods and Adult Schools were important agencies in fostering and keeping alive the movement's connections with organised religion.

These organisations suffered from the war, and from the post-war growth in mass entertainment. The W.D.P. reported that the Brotherhood movement had 'never really recovered from the war ... Attendances have been reduced since the war and have never recovered their former strength.'[9] Nevertheless, the 51 Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods affiliated to the Bristol and District Federation in 1932 could claim a total membership of almost 7000.[10] In 1926 the Adult Schools were

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1. B.T.M., 23 March 1921.
2. D. Carter, op.cit.
3. W.D.P., 3 October 1919.
4. V. J. Bellamy and J. Saville, National Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. II, p.269.
5. B.E.P., 21 April 1932.
6. B.E.P., 7 December 1937.
7. Conversation with H. E. Rogers.
8. B.T.M., 30 August 1921.
9. W.D.P., 25 September 1935.
10. W.D.P., 4 April 1932.

said to have over 2000 members.[1] Thus they still retained something of their pre-war vigour and influence, and in some cases, notably the Redfield Brotherhood in the East, congregations remained large. Indeed, the agent of the East C.L.P., Rogers, considered the Brotherhoods to be so influential still in the local community that he was very keen to get Labour speakers into their Sunday meetings.[2] On their monthly weekend visits to Bristol the M.P.s, Baker and his successor Cripps, were regularly booked to speak at a Brotherhood meeting. Rogers wrote to Cripps as late as 1931: 'There are a number of men's meetings in the constituency and I think it would be worth attending in cases like Redfield Brotherhood where there is an attendance of 800 men, but I do not think it is worth while accepting every invitation.'[3]

The relationship was reciprocal. The minister of the Redfield Brotherhood, Rev. Barker, was a prominent member of the East C.L.P.[4] Leading figures in the Labour Party received most of their training, not only in the skills of public speaking, but also in the moral basis of their socialism in the Adult Schools and Brotherhoods. Many combined their roles as councillors with the task of lay preacher in one of the many chapels, and often they were trade union officials as well. In this way the Labour Party can be said to have been the heir of a 19th century Radical tradition, particularly in East Bristol.

It was a sign, however, that the Bristol Labour movement had not yet become fully independent that a large number of its activists were trained in organisations which, although sympathetic to its broader aims, and overlapping with it at many points, were nevertheless not part

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1. W.D.P., 27 October 1926.
2. Conversations with the author.
3. H. E. Rogers to Cripps, 22 January 1931, (Bristol South-East C.L.P., Papers).
4. Bristol East C.L.P., Mins., passim.

of that movement and which were located within a Liberal Radical, not socialist, tradition. For, although the Brotherhoods and Adult Schools provided a training that was not otherwise available, they could not be said to have laid the foundations for an independent political party. After 1918, Labour speakers in Bristol made much play of the fact that the Labour Party was now a 'fully-fledged independent political party,' and that the basis of that independence was a socialist programme. The membership of the party grew rapidly, and yet there was very little attempt by the C.L.P.s or the B.L.P. to educate these new members in the ideas of socialism. This task was left to the I.L.P., whilst leading figures such as councillors concentrated on their committee work and on electioneering. As we shall see, the more socialistic aspects of Labour's 1918 programme and constitution tended to be played down in later years.[1] Perhaps one of the reasons why this was allowed to happen, at least from the point of view of the Bristol Labour movement, was that the Labour Party had a leadership which had largely been trained in, and drawn its inspiration from, a religious and politically Liberal Radical background, and a membership which, for the most part, had received very little training in the ideas of the movement.

The preponderance of various groups among the Labour councillors provides an insight into the nature of the party. Apart from the large group of lay preachers, and of I.L.P. members the other large groups were employees of the Co-operative Society, and trade union officials. There was considerable overlap between all these categories. In 1919,

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1. See below, pp. 230-241.

out of 15 candidates, four were officials, but only three were manual workers.[1] During the period 1919-1926 there were never more than three manual workers as candidates in any one year, and frequently only one. White collar workers tended to be more numerous, whilst shopkeepers and small businessmen frequently outnumbered the manual workers. Women also tended to be poorly represented. By far the biggest group in most years was union officials, and when in 1925 the Labour Party decided to contest 21 wards, no less than 13 of the candidates were officials.

There were a number of reasons for this. One was that in Bristol there were a large number of officials because of the variety of unions operating in the City, and because for many, such as the T.G.W.U., Bristol was a regional organisational centre. They were men with a certain amount of platform ability and administrative experience, qualities that were often valued more highly than political acumen in local councillors. Among the manual workers there was considerable difficulty in getting leave of absence for council work, yet the Labour Party never voiced very strongly the demand for evening rather than afternoon Council meetings, which would have freed many manual workers for this work. The fact was that the individual membership units of the party had not developed sufficiently for them to be able to produce candidates from within their own ranks who had the qualities which the party regarded as necessary for its public representatives to possess - speaking ability and administrative competence.

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1. Biographical details of election candidates were provided in the course of press reporting of campaigns. A.W.S. Burgess was a good example of the type of Labour leader under consideration here. As well as being a councillor for Stapleton ward between 1919 and 1925 and an active member of Bristol North C.L.P., he was a T.G.W.U. official, a lay preacher in the United Methodist Church and a non-active member of the I.L.P.
(See Biographical Appendix, below, p. 396).

But trade union officials tended to bring to their Labour Party work other qualities as well as these. The world of the trade union official was one in which administrative questions occupied major importance, and in which compromise and conciliation were a way of life, fostering a tendency in their outlook towards narrowness and caution.[1] It is true that during the 1920s class conflicts were experienced most sharply at the level of the unions, and that this would tend to have a radicalising influence. But, as we have seen, the position of the officials in relation to these conflicts was often different from that of their members, since through their procedural arrangements with employers they had taken on something of a mediatory role. Moreover, those officials who were most involved in the conflicts were not those who became councillors, although an exception was Gill of the miners. The councillors tended to be drawn from unions more remote from the struggles, such as N.U.B.S.O., the Tailors, the Post Office workers, N.U.D.A.W., and the Clerks. Some were from the T.G.W.U., but again were drawn from the less militant sections; Burgess was the Clerical section officer, and Millard was Secretary of the union's National Health Insurance and Approved Society Section. Thus one feature of these officials commented on by W. Coldrick, who was N.C.L.C. organiser in Bristol from 1927, and who was a product of the South Wales movement where the officials played a much less prominent part in Labour Party affairs, was that he was 'sometimes amazed at the arguments a trade union official would put up, it would be so limited in outlook; no comprehension whatsoever of the purpose of the Labour movement and the things we were fighting for.'[2]

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1. R. Michels summarised what he saw as the typical outlook of a trade union official thus: 'Their vision gained in precision but lost in extent. The more cotton spinners, boot and shoe operatives or brush makers the labour leader could gain each month for his union, the better versed he was in the tedious subtleties of insurance against accident and illness, the greater the industry he could display in the specialised questions of factory inspection and of arbitration in trade disputes, ..., the more difficult it was for him to retain a general interest in the labour movement, even in the narrowest sense.' R. Michels, Political Parties, (New York 1959 ed.), p.188.
2. Conversation with the author.

VI) The Electoral Challenge

We have seen that in the immediate post-war period the trade unions were the primary focus of working class discontents. A theory usually associated with the late G.D.H. Cole was that Black Friday in 1921 marked a break with the ideas of direct action and a turn to parliamentary politics.[1] The evidence from Bristol suggests that in the period 1919-1921 workers regarded the trade union struggle and the Labour Party effort at elections as essentially complimentary; they were both a means by which workers made their presence felt on the political scene, although their attentions were directed primarily towards the industrial struggle. After 1921, the unions appeared much less effective as agencies of change. That workers did not ignore the Labour Party before 1921 can be demonstrated by its showing at municipal elections after the war.

Table IV Labour's Fortunes in Municipal Elections 1919-1925[2]

	1913	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925
No. of candidates	3	15	16	16	13	15	15	21
Votes won	2638	19954	24586	24400	24510	28576	28876	37083
Seats gained/lost	+2	+7	+3	+2	-3	0	0	+2
Total councillors	7	14	17	19	16	16	16	18
Aldermen	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3

The table shows the Labour Party, over the period as a whole, riding a strong upward trend, broken only by a short period from 1922-24 when the Coalition succeeded in mounting a brief counter-attack.

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1. See for example, G.D.H. Cole, The Labour Party since 1914, (1948), p.117.
2. This table is based on election results published annually in the local press viz. W.D.P.: B.T.H.

Equipped with its new election machinery the party was determined to contest as many seats as possible, and as the network was consolidated and extended into new areas, so it proved possible to contest more seats, so that by 1925, with the development of the party in the West, only the two Central wards, both firmly in the Conservative grip, were not contested. As the number of contests increased, so too did the total Labour vote, which almost doubled between 1919 and 1925. This increase in total votes was a trend which cut across all others. It was disproportionate to the increase in the number of contests, and continued even when Labour was losing seats. Within the Council chamber the Labour vote was trebled, and became a serious threat to the dominance of the Coalition.

In the face of this threat the Liberal and Conservative parties moved even closer together. Even before the war there had been 'a marked disinclination to contest' by the two parties,[1] but after it, in the face of the Labour Party's assertiveness, the Coalition continued as an avowedly anti-socialist force, and not even Independents or Asquithian Liberals were prepared to break the pact. Indeed, so strong was the Coalition that it survived both the break up of the Coalition Government at Westminster in 1922 and the acrimony of the 1923 General Election, and was finally formalized in 1925 with the formation of the Citizen party.[2]

The Conservatives had benefitted from the arrangement not to contest before the war. In 1913 they monopolised the representation in ten wards, all of them in the declining centre or the west of the City, where the upper income groups and the business and commercial communities lived and worked. Of those ten, most had relatively small voting registers, and all except Westbury were either stable or

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1. W.D.P., 2 November 1910.
2. The name 'Citizen' party was adopted in 1924.

declining in population. The last boundary changes had been in 1904, when wards to the North, East and South were added to the City, but the distribution of seats was still weighted in favour of the older, and decaying areas.[1] Thus in 1921, 889 electors in the Central West ward enjoyed the same representation as the 10915 electors of Stapleton; as the wards on the outer fringe of the city continued to expand, so the disparity in representation increased.

It was in the solidly Tory central and western areas that Labour made the least impact in the post-war years. The Central wards were never contested, and Clifton and Redland not until 1925. Of the wards where Tories dominated, only Westbury, Redcliff and St. Augustine, all with substantial working class populations, were seriously contested, with only one gain in St. Augustine to show for the effort.[2] This would seem to suggest that there were strong nucleii of working class Toryism in Redcliff and St. Augustine, both of which contained extensive slum areas and were the habitats of casual dock workers. Labour party workers tended to attribute the strength of Toryism in Redcliff to the influence of St. Mary Redcliff church.[3] There is no way of checking this, but the fact that Labour was unable to make much impact in the area illustrates that it was not accepted by substantial groups of workers as their party until much later than the early 1920s.

In a number of wards, however, the Labour Party came to dominate the representation. By 1913 it controlled the three Easton seats, formerly held by the Liberals, and this hold was maintained after the war. After the war the Labour Party established a monopoly of seats in the St. George East and West wards, St. Phillip and Jacob North

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1. The numbers of voters in each ward was published in the local press, with election results, on 2 November of each year.
2. The seat was gained in 1919, and lost again three years later.
3. e.g., A.W.S. Burgess, writing in Bristol Labour Weekly, 12 November 1927.

and South, and near monopolies in Bedminster East and West. By 1926 these seven wards returned 18 of the 21 Labour councillors. Solidly working class in composition, their representation had traditionally been dominated by the Liberals, and the Labour Party's gains were made, therefore, almost wholly at the expense of the Liberal side of the Coalition. These areas, dotted with innumerable chapels, were the base in Bristol of radical Nonconformity.[1] In undermining the Liberal support and replacing many Liberal councillors, the Labour Party was, in many ways, the heir to that radical tradition.

A large number of these wards had been the scene of Bristol's later 19th century expansion. The inner areas of St. Phillip and Jacob, and Bedminster had grown up in the first half of the last century, as had St. Paul's, another area where Labour was beginning to establish a foothold.[2] Thus they tended to be relatively stable in population, with a slight tendency towards decline, and to contain large numbers of decaying dwellings. But the bulk of the Labour support was drawn from those wards which had been added as a result of the boundary changes and ward reorganisation of the years 1897-1904. In other words, they were districts which had developed most markedly during the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. This was the period of Bristol's most rapid 19th century growth, which had been concentrated in a belt of land to the east and south of the old City.[3] According to Hewitt this was traditionally the home of the unskilled worker, with large numbers of its inhabitants working in general labouring or transport trades. In the East there were chemical and metal working factories around Crews Hole in St. George; at Barton Hill there was the Great Western Cotton Factory, and this was also the

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1. See D. Carter, op.cit.
2. F. Hewitt, 'Population and Urban Growth in East Bristol in 19th and early 20th centuries', pp.76-77, (Ph.D. Bristol 1965).
3. ibid., p.79.

home of a number of railwaymen. Other identifiable groups of workers in the area were boot and shoe workers in the East and the miners of Speedwell, Kingswood and Bedminster. Bedminster also contained the extensive factories, employing large numbers of women workers, of the Wills and Robinson combines. Those workers who were members of the T.G.W.U., N.U.R.S.O. and the railway unions were linked with the Labour Party through union affiliations, as were the building workers. In some areas it was normal practice to choose candidates who were linked to the trade unionists in the ward; thus railwaymen frequently contested the St. Phillip's wards, and Gill of the miners won a seat in Bedminster. Members of N.U.R.S.O. were popular choices in Kingswood.

In the East and the South the Labour Party succeeded in capturing the allegiances of the solid phalanx of the manual working class, and thereby hoisting itself into a position of some strength in the Council. But by the 1920s those areas from which the Labour Party was able to draw support were no longer the dynamic growth areas of the City. Population growth for the City as a whole had slowed down considerably, but the population was spreading itself into the surrounding countryside; the expanding areas were Stapleton, Fishponds, Brislington and Knowle, and, to the North, Sea Mills and Southmead out towards Avonmouth and Filton.[1]

Moreover, the dormitory suburbs were the areas where the growing number of white-collar workers were taking up residence, and it was significant for the development of the Labour Party that neither it, nor the unions, succeeded at this stage in attracting the support of the vast majority of these workers.[2]

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1. H. Shannon, op.cit.
2. For the growth of the white-collar labour force see below, pp. 258-9. It is perhaps significant that the successful Labour candidate in Stapleton was A.W.S. Burgess, the official for the clerical section of the T.G.W.U.

Solidly Labour areas experienced little or no growth in the inter-war period, whilst the Labour Party made little or no impact in the dormitory suburbs and areas of newer housing. There were four wards in this group: Westbury, Horfield, Stapleton, and Somerset. Only Westbury had been traditionally a Tory preserve. The rest had been mainly Liberal seats since the time they had been established as wards in the 1897-1904 reorganisation. Yet only in Stapleton did Labour make any inroads into the Coalition vote. New council housing estates were begun in Westbury and Somerset at this time,[1] but before 1926 were insignificant in terms of the balance between working and middle class housing in the wards, and the political complexion continued to be set by the predominantly middle class voters in the residential areas, who were overwhelmingly behind the Coalition. Thus through their arrangement with the Liberals the Tories managed to break out of their precariously narrow base in the Centre and West. Labour, on the other hand, entrenched itself within the solidly working class areas, and in the period 1919-1926, concentrated on winning and consolidating a position there. The fact that this was too narrow a base, because of the City's ward structure, from which to capture control of the Council, was not an acute problem while the priority was to capture and hold the working class wards.

In parliamentary elections, too, Labour began to make a major impact. Of the five Bristol divisions, the West was completely out of the Labour Party's reach, whilst the Central could normally be expected to be Tory, although there were substantial working class populations and some Labour support in the St. Augustine's, Redcliff, and St. Paul's wards,

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1. R. Jevons & J. Madge, Housing Estates. A study of Bristol Corporation Policy, (Bristol 1946), p.18.

and the St. Phillip's and St. Jacob South ward. But these were outweighed by the residual working class Toryism in these areas, and by the solid Tory support in the Central wards, St. James and St. Michaels. The East Constituency was a possible safe Labour seat. It had a long Radical Liberal tradition, had never returned a Tory to Westminster, and thus provided Labour with its best opportunity for winning a seat. The North and South divisions were more marginal. Normally Liberal before 1914, they contained a mixture of working- and middle class areas. Stapleton in the North contained mainly middle class housing, but there were working class districts, as also in that part of Easton which was in the North Division. St. Phillip and Jacob North was solidly Labour by the early 1920s, but this was outweighed by the middle class voters of District. The South was equally mixed. Bedminster and Southville contained miners, dockers and tobacco workers, but further out on the fringes of Bedminster and in Somerset ward middle class voters predominated.

Labour's share of the votes cast in General Elections showed an enormous increase between 1918 and 1922, as shown in the table:

Table V The Labour vote as percentage of total votes cast[1]

		BRISTOL				
	England	Central	East	North	South	West
1918	22.6%	36.8%	42.8%	26.5%	31.8%	-
1922	28.8	44.1	49.7	35.4	43.8	-
1923	29.7	45.3	53.7	37.5	47.3	-
1924	32.9	44.9	58.2	40.9	48.4	21.0

1. F. S. Craig, British General Election results, 1918-1949, (Glasgow, 1969).

The total vote accruing to Labour candidates almost doubled between 1918 and 1922, from 26688 to 48279. It continued to rise thereafter, and reached 55235 in 1924, despite Labour's setbacks in that election.[1] But the gains in terms of seats won were not so impressive. The 1922 election confirmed the trend towards Labour which had been established in the Municipal elections, but, despite coming within 151 votes of victory in the East, no seats were won. Nevertheless, the securing of some 44% or more of the vote in three out of four divisions established the Labour Party, even more firmly than 1918 had done, as the party to which more and more workers were turning for a solution to their problems. The East division was captured by W. Baker in 1923, and has been held ever since. In the South and Central strong Labour followings were built up so that, by 1924, the party could secure 48.4% of the vote in the latter. But in straight fights with Coalitionist candidates - even after the collapse of the Coalition at Westminster - the seats remained in Tory and Liberal hands. In the North Labour support was much weaker than elsewhere - the peak was a 40.9% poll in 1924 - but the splitting of the middle class vote in 1923 between Conservative and Liberal candidates allowed Ayles to capture the seat.[2] The lesson of 1923 was quickly taken to heart by the Liberals and Tories in the Divisions, and in 1924 a Liberal was put up with Tory support to recapture the seat.[3] After the 1924 election then, Labour was left with only one seat out of five in Bristol; only in the East was the party able to hold its own in straight fights with either Liberal or Tory opponents.

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1. Craig, op.cit.
2. ibid.
3. The Times, 14 October 1924; 'Nowhere in the West is the Coalition spirit so strong as in the City of Bristol. This is probably due to necessity rather than to choice, for both Unionists and Liberals realize that 3 cornered contests might well hand over at least four out of five seats to Labour. The disastrous experiment of Bristol North, last year, is not likely to be repeated.' Capt. F.E. Guest, brother of Colonel Guest, was successful candidate in 1924.

By 1924 the position of the Liberals in Bristol had been severely undermined as Labour chiselled away at their electoral support. But Labour's success was tempered by its inability to beat its opponents in straight fights, since only in Bristol East was there a clear preponderance of working class voters. Moreover, there was a strong residual attachment to Liberalism. Under the Coalition arrangements the Conservatives were only able to claim the West and Central as their preserves, and had to agree to support Liberal candidates in the other three, albeit Lloyd Georgian Liberals. But the Liberalism to which they were attached had none of the radicalism and reforming zeal that had swept the party to power in 1906, and after 1918 Liberalism as an independent political force in Bristol was dead. In the face of the Labour threat the Liberals were driven to take shelter within the Conservative dominated anti-socialist Coalition, which enabled them to retain many of their seats, but denied them the possibility of coming forward with any distinctive policies with which to challenge the Labour Party for working class support. They were entrenched ever more firmly in a negative compact which completely emasculated them as a political force, and the takeover by Labour of the radical tradition was thus made easier.[1]

The arrangement survived the break up of the Coalition in 1922, and would have remained intact in 1923 had not Colonel Guest in Bristol North raised the Free Trade banner in response to the Tories' protectionist proposals. In the South and the East not even the free trade issue could persuade Liberals and Tories to abandon their compact. Instead, they

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1. The Times, 13 November 1922; Sir Beddoe Rees, Coalition candidate in Bristol South, was reported as saying that, in Bristol, party politics had been dead for some time. He was referring, of course, to the lack of contests between Liberals and Conservatives. Other statements by Coalition candidates at this time make it clear that the struggle against the Labour party was seen in class terms, not as party politics.

ignored the issue. Rees, the Liberal, won Bristol South in 1923 with Tory support, around the slogan, 'Vote for Rees and Smash Socialism.'[1] In the short run this saved the Liberal seats, but in abdicating the role of radical alternative the Liberals had allowed the Labour Party to adopt this mantle, and thereby exposed themselves still further to Labour attack, or to absorption by the Tories. Captain Guest, who succeeded his brother in Bristol North in 1924, and was more acceptable to the Tories since he regarded Liberalism by this time as 'no more than a political expression',[2] gradually came to understand the logic of the situation and drifted into the conservative camp.[3]

A number of factors contributed to the success of the Labour party in Bristol in establishing itself as the predominant political expression of the local working class. Among the more important of these factors were the post-war flight of property into the negative anti-socialist coalition, the abdication by the Liberal party of the role of radical alternative to the Conservatives, and the placing of the issue of class conflict at the centre of local parliamentary and, to a lesser extent, municipal politics in the immediate post-war period. But the transference of allegiance by workers to another parliamentary party was by no means automatic. The Labour Party's capture of the majority of working class votes was built on an ambivalent relationship between the party and the class, particularly those sections which were actively engaged in conflict. This ambivalence has been noted in relation to the trade union struggles up to and including Black Friday. It was seen even more sharply in relation to the struggles of the unemployed, for the unemployment issue was one on which the Labour Party claimed to be able to offer a clear alternative to the policies of the Liberals and Tories, and the one on which much of the Labour success was built in the period 1922-1924. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the struggles of the unemployed in Bristol.

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1. W.D.P., 7 December 1923.
2. T. Wilson, The Downfall of the Liberal Party, (1966), p.262.
3. ibid. p.378.

VII) Unemployed Struggles

After the war, as demobilisation proceeded, and reabsorption of the ex-servicemen into civilian employment failed to keep pace with the rate of demobilisation, the bitterness of the unemployed introduced a new dimension into the already volatile political scene. Their immediate response was to band together in ad hoc bodies which expressed their special claims as unemployed ex-servicemen, demanding the fruits of Lloyd George's 'land fit for heroes', and holding themselves aloof from the Labour movement. Three main organisations emerged in Bristol - the Comrades of the Great War, the International Union of Ex-Servicemen, and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobbed Soldiers and Sailors.[1] A British Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors also gained a following. The three main bodies were linked through a Grand Federal Council of Ex-Servicemen's organisations in Bristol, and there was some overlap in their leadership.[2]

In their attitude to the Labour movement there was confusion. They were for the most part fiercely chauvinistic, supporting punitive peace terms, and therefore not attracted to the Labour Party by its attitude to Versailles.[3] But on social questions there was some overlap with the Labour Party. Originally they were formed as political pressure groups, organising deputations to the Lord Mayor to call for local relief works, and nationally putting pressure on the Government to honour its promises. But as it became increasingly clear that the Government had no intention of doing so, they began to look to the Labour Party as a possible ally. On some issues they shared the Labour Party's radicalism. They supported, for example, Labour's proposals for the

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1. Little is known of these organisations, save that which can be gleaned from press reports of their activities and pronouncements. No documentation has survived in Bristol Record Office.
2. B.T.M., 26 May 1919.
3. ibid.

municipalisation of the trams, gas and water undertakings, and for better housing.[1] The International Union of Ex-Servicemen was close to some of the Labour Party's attitudes on foreign policy, particularly in its opposition to further wars, and supported the Council of Action preparations to prevent war in 1920.[2]

But there were difficulties in the way of close relations with the Labour Party. During the 1919 municipal election the Grand Federal Council decided to field its own candidates in working class wards. The National Federation, which was not linked to the Council, arrived at an understanding with the Labour Party whereby four of its candidates were run jointly with the Labour Party. The Council also tried to negotiate an electoral compact with the Labour Party, but was rebuffed and decided to oppose Labour candidates in the election.[3] Eight candidates were fielded, seven in direct opposition to Labour, and although the party was not seriously threatened by this challenge, in St. Paul's and Southville wards, the split in the working class vote was a serious embarrassment.

There were difficulties on both sides. The ex-servicemen's organisations distrusted the Labour Party because of its links with the unions, which they tended to blame for their failure to find work. Trades union restrictions on entry to the trades were the cause, they argued, of much unemployment. In particular they pointed to the closed shop operated by the dockers, and to the restriction on the number of apprentices enforced by the skilled building unions. Their candidates in the 1919 election stressed that they were fighting 'the tyranny of trades unionism.'[4] So serious did these attacks become that in June

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1. W.D.P., 24 October 1919.
2. B.T.H., 23 August 1920.
3. W.D.P., 17 October 1919.
4. W.D.P., 17 October 1919.

1920 leading Labour councillors, including Sheppard and Sennington, persuaded the Lord Mayor to convene a meeting of unions and ex-servicemen to investigate the substance of their charges. The brunt of the attack was borne by the building workers. The meetings ended in bitterness and recrimination, with the unions being accused of showing 'no sympathy to the ex-soldiers and ... deliberately placing impediments in the way of men finding employment.' Gilmour, a leading ex-serviceman, warned that 'war has been declared against them, and he intended to accept the challenge, and would fight without any compromise.'[1]

Already the dangers of a clash between trade unionists and the unemployed had been heralded at the end of April 1920 when ex-servicemen demonstrated outside the tramways offices to demand that women conductresses be dismissed and replaced by men. For three days, running battles occurred in the tramways centre and the Old Market area when ex-servicemen attacked the company's offices, burnt tramcars, and physically assaulted conductresses.[2] An ultimatum was issued by the International Union that all female labour should be discharged within a week.[3] Within 24 hours the company capitulated. The Labour movement condemned these tactics as attacks on members of the same class. The United Vehicle Workers' Union, whose members were under attack, called on the members of ex-servicemen's organisations 'to force their leaders to join hands with the Labour movement, or transfer their membership to an organisation which stands for real uniformity of action against the real enemy.'[4] But the ex-servicemen were not uniformly hostile to

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1. F. Sheppard papers, (Bristol City Archives, 11172(2)), Mins. of a Committee of trade unionists and ex-servicemen, convened by Lord Mayor, re charges made by discharged soldiers concerning the unemployed and trade unions, June 1920.
2. W.D.P., 27-29 April 1920; B.T.M., ibid.
3. W.D.P., 28 April 1920; B.T.M., ibid.
4. B.T.M., 29 April 1920.

the unions. During the 1919 railway strike, for example, the Comrades of the Great War took up a position of 'strict neutrality', refusing to strike break, but at the same time calling on the unions to support its demands concerning gratuities and pensions and to recognise their right to equal employment opportunities.[1]

The Labour movement's response to this agitation was both confused and dilatory. The ex-servicemen were condemned for splitting the forces of labour, and for thus being used by the enemies of the movement. They were condemned also for their tactics of organising street collections and militant street demonstrations, leading to clashes with the police. In the view of the Labour leadership, the correct strategy for the unemployed, whether ex-servicemen or not, was to work for a Labour victory in elections.[2] But neither the Labour Party nor the unions had much to offer the unemployed, either in terms of a programme, or in terms of organisation. Separate organisations specifically for the unemployed were regarded with suspicion. Large numbers of the unemployed were unskilled, who before they left for the war would have had very little contact with the unions, and therefore returned to find a new situation which they did not understand and which they tended to blame for their failure to find employment. The growth of the unions had occurred mainly whilst they had been away at the front. Nor did the Labour Party or the unions attempt to relate to the special problems faced by the ex-servicemen and take the initiative in campaigning on the issues which most affected them. Thus, the field was left free for the separate ex-servicemen's organisation to make the running and the Labour movement

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1. W.D.P., 1 October 1919; B.T.M., ibid.
2. These were arguments used by Labour candidates during the 1919 Municipal election campaign.

merely trailed along in their wake. Within the movement the initiative might have come from the Trades Council, the campaigning centre of the movement locally, or from the I.L.P., the body which regarded itself as the 'forward wing' of the movement. But the Trades Council, like the Labour Party, was in the process of reorganisation, whilst the I.L.P. was overwhelmingly concerned with international questions at this time.

During 1920 and 1921, however, the situation changed. In May 1920 the National Federation rejected a motion at its annual conference for affiliation to the Labour Party, and decided to amalgamate with the other ex-servicemen's organisations.[1] In 1921 those bodies which locally had been grouped in the Grand Federal Council, together with the Officers' Association, amalgamated under the name of the British Legion, a body that attempted to be apolitical and thus led ex-servicemen away from the more militant tactics they had previously been adopting.[2] The ex-servicemen as an organised pressure group gradually faded from the political scene. Moreover, the character of unemployment was itself changing as the post-war boom gave way to a slump, accompanied by mass unemployment. No longer was unemployment specifically an ex-servicemen's problem, and the fact that thousands of trade unionists were losing their jobs forced the Labour movement to begin campaigning on their behalf.

The movement locally was in a better position to carry out this task when it had completed its reorganisation in 1920, and appointed a full-time secretary of the Trades Council. In January 1921 the Council made its first intervention in the unemployed struggle when it organised

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1. B.T.H., 25 May 1920.
2. B.T.H., 9 April 1921.

a demonstration around the socialist demand for "Work or Full Pay".[1] The situation was rapidly changing. In March 1921 the Government ended the special post-war donation benefit, forcing the unemployed to rely on the inadequate Unemployment Insurance benefits or, if they did not qualify, on outdoor relief provided by the Boards of Guardians.[2] At the same time, the local authorities too were under pressure to reduce public spending and were beginning to consider reductions in the Guardians' relief scales. The advent of mass unemployment - there were over 20,000 out of work in Bristol in September 1921 - was thus accompanied by a hardening of official attitudes towards maintenance.[3]

In September 1921 the unemployed returned to the streets to demand adequate relief scales. During the first week of the month, almost daily demonstrations besieged the gates of the Guardians' offices in St. Peter's Hospital, and demanded that the board receive deputations to discuss raising the relief scales.[4] The leadership of the demonstrations had been seized by militants. The red flag was hoisted and E. Silk, a leading spokesman, was said to have declared that 'they had tried every weapon from a peaceful standpoint, and that day they were going to try another.' Another spokesman was W. Hayman, an engineer, who was probably the Communist who had come to Bristol from Manchester and was attempting to form a branch of the C.P. in the city, but his part in the demonstrations was relatively minor.[5] Much more important were Silk, Hamilton and Daniels, two other engineers, and Stewart, a cabinet maker who had no connection with the C.P. On September 7th when the Guardians

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1. W.D.P., 3 January 1921.
2. B. Gilbert, British Social policy 1914-1939, (London 1970), ch.2.
3. W.D.P., 4 September 1921.
4. W.D.P., 1-13 September 1921; B.T.M., ibid.
5. W. Paxton, Conversation with the author; the transcript of this conversation will be deposited in the University of Bristol Library. Paxton was unable to confirm whether the W. Hayman referred to here was the person who founded the British branch of the C.P.G.B., but this would seem a likely proposition, given the similarity in names. The local branch of the C.P.G.B. have no records relating to this period.

insisted they would only meet a deputation of four, instead of the eleven demanded by the unemployed, the demonstrators stormed the gates of St. Peter's Hospital, and were beaten back by police baton charges. When the unemployed attempted to hold street meetings that evening, they were again broken up by the police.[1]

The following day Ayles led a deputation to the Council House to demand that the next Council meeting should receive a deputation of the unemployed.[2] That evening, however, there were further clashes with the police when four of the leaders were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly.[3] On 13th September the Council took the unprecedented step of receiving a deputation and agreed to put pressure on the Government for more schemes of public works.[4] But the leaders of this deputation were not the militants who had been prominent in the street demonstrations; instead, Parker, Secretary of the Trade Council, acted as spokesman. This was significant, for it indicated that the more moderate leadership of the Labour movement had been successful in wresting control of the campaign away from the rank and file leadership. The official Labour movement had been acutely embarrassed by the resort to direct action by the unemployed, and was determined to steer the movement away from street demonstrations and into constitutional channels.

Ayles explained his position. 'I heard of the trouble on Wednesday, and as a pacifist and a working class member of the Council, I wished to prevent violent methods of obtaining reform, just as I did during the war. I got into touch with the Education Committee, and they decided to continue the feeding of children. I then went down to the men and told them I was prepared to help them if they were prepared to adopt

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1. W.D.P., 8 September 1921.
2. W.D.P., 9 September 1921.
3. W.D.P., 9-10 September 1921.
4. W.D.P., 14 September 1921; B.T.M., ibid.

purely pacifist measures and act constitutionally. This was agreed to and I went with a deputation to the Council House.'[1] One of the first demands made by Ayles and Parker was that the Council should place halls at the disposal of the unemployed, so that they could avoid the danger of clashes with police at open air meetings. Such measures helped to take the sting out of the agitation. By negotiating some concessions and directing the thrust of the agitation away from the streets and into the Council chamber the Labour leadership captured the initiative. But the leadership provided by the Trades Council and Labour councillors was very much on their own terms; they acted more as mediatory agents than as leaders of a campaign. Parker spelled this out to the unemployed on 12th September: 'The Trades Council,' he said, 'has given its backing to the authorities that there would be no disorder. The authorities recognise the organisation we have built to get relief, and are prepared to meet us round the table to try to find a solution to the problem.'[2]

But the continuing leadership of the Trades Council and Labour councillors in the unemployed movement could by no means be assured. Mass meetings, one of which the W.D.P. claimed was called by the Communist Party, continued to be held outside the control of recognised Labour leaders.[3] Moreover, whilst the unemployed were denied the right of access to the authorities, street demonstrations in which a militant rank and file leadership held the initiative were inevitable occurrences. It was not enough for the Labour movement, therefore, to attempt to direct the unemployed's attention towards the municipal elections in November. The Labour movement gained control over the unemployed agitation by establishing a Bristol Unemployed Committee in the autumn of 1921, which was affiliated to the Trades Council, and in which Parker played

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1. W.D.P., 9 September 1921.
2. W.D.P., 13 September 1921.
3. W.D.P., 17 October 1921.

a key role, but which was forced to include among its leading personnel Hamilton, and the former leaders of the ex-servicemen, Gilmour and Linton, who had not thrown in their lot with the British Legion.[1] Within the Unemployed Committee there was thus an uneasy partnership between these three elements. But the tactics were predominantly those favoured by the official Labour movement. The Committee, later the Bristol Unemployed Association, gained recognition from the Guardians and the Council as the channel of communication between the authorities and the unemployed, in return for a pledge that deputations would no longer be accompanied by street demonstrations.

The struggle of the unemployed called into question the ability of the Labour movement to relate to the needs of those who looked to it for leadership. There was a constant suspicion in the minds of the unemployed that the movement represented the interests only of the employed and this suspicion was increased by the opposition, on the part of the unions especially, to separate organisations for the unemployed. The unemployed, also, manifested markedly less respect for constitutional propriety. A conference on unemployment convened by the Trades Council in October 1921 brought these conflicts to the surface. The main points made by unemployed spokesmen at the conference were that the employed should call a 24 hour strike as an expression of solidarity, 'to remove the suspicion that the employed do not care.'[2] They also argued that their immediate needs were not served by deputations to the Council. The claim was made that the Labour Party had no solution for unemployment, and that 'all they tried for were votes and bolstering up the system. They would never capture the system by votes.'[3]

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1. The first reference to this Committee was in B.T.H., 15 December 1921.
2. W.D.P., 17 October 1921.
3. W.D.P., 17 October 1921.

Ayles came in for particular attack from the militants at this conference. Yet he was the only figure within the local movement who had attempted to come to terms with the political problems posed by unemployment. An I.L.P. pamphlet written by him in 1921 entitled The Hell of Unemployment was a statement of his belief that the problem was one of under-consumption, and could only be solved ultimately by legislation aimed at the redistribution of wealth.[1] In other words, he believed there was no solution to unemployment under capitalism. But his was not a theory which could provide an immediate strategy for the unemployed movement. Even the short-term solutions he proposed - unemployed insurance by the industries themselves, and works of public utility financed out of taxation of the rich - required parliamentary action by a Labour Government. He explicitly attacked the unemployed's proposals for strike action and a shorter working week as irrelevant since they would do nothing to increase consumption.

For Ayles, 'Work or Maintenance' was an election slogan, not a demand that the unemployed could themselves mobilise around. In practical terms, it meant for him a demand for afforestation, road building, land reclamation and canal building. He championed the scheme for a Bristol to Birmingham canal, thus finding himself in the company of local businessmen and the Chamber of Commerce.[2] Indeed, there was nothing distinctively socialist about his under-consumptionist theory, for it was largely borrowed from the progressive Liberal views of J. A. Hobson. Thus when the unemployed delegates at the Trades Council conference answered his speech with the retort, 'It's the old Liberal gag,' they were substantially correct.[3]

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1. W. Ayles, The Hell of Unemployment, (London 1921).
2. Ayles advocated such schemes in his election campaigns, e.g., W.D.P., 10 November 1922.
3. W.D.P., 17 October 1921.

On the one hand, then, the Labour movement consistently stressed the need for the unemployed to work for the return of a Labour Government to bring about a socialist transformation of society. But in terms of the day to day action by the unemployed to defend their interests, the strategy was to divert the movement away from confrontations with the authorities towards a more collaborative approach. Thus in September 1921 the Labour group persuaded the Lord Mayor to lead a deputation consisting of Flowers of the A.E.U., Verdon-Smith, the managing director of the Tramways and secretary of the Local Ministry of Labour Employment Committee, and Alderman Sennington, to the Ministries of Health, Labour and Transport, to request aid for more local relief schemes.[1] Another important facet of this approach was, in Ayles' words, to convince the authorities of 'the reasonableness of their cause'.[2] Hence meetings were arranged between the unemployed and local M.P.s, the Guardians, and Liberal and Tory councillors.[3] In this way the official Labour leadership came to be recognised by the authorities as trustworthy, reasonable men who could be relied upon to curtail the excesses of the unemployed. In October 1922, for example, the militant leadership made a brief reappearance, and the Chairman of the Board of Guardians contrasted these men with Parker and Linton who, over the past year 'had been very valuable in keeping the men in check.'[4]

One aim of the Labour movement's strategy - the securing of recognition - had thus been achieved. But they were not notably successful in securing concessions for the unemployed. The operation

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1. W.D.P., 21 September 1921; B.T.M., ibid.
2. W.D.P., 17 October 1921.
3. B.T.M., 15 December 1921.
4. B.T.M., 28 October 1922; W.D.P., ibid.

of the test work system and disqualifications under the 'Not Genuinely Seeking Work' clause continued to bear down on the unemployed, and the Trades Council, together with the Unemployed Association campaigned jointly against these.[1] Linton frequently advised the unemployed to leave the struggle to their representatives on the Guardians or the Council,[2] but the weakness of the Labour groups on both - in 1923, Labour only possessed 17 out of 69 Guardians seats - meant that this method could only be of limited use, especially when those representatives were charged with administering regulations and relief scales to which they were opposed. The Trades Council attempted to offer an alternative to the test work system in 1922 when it proposed to take over from the Guardians the responsibility for cutting a new road at Southmead, to employ the unemployed on the project and pay full trade union rates instead of test work rates. But the scheme was rejected by the Guardians.[3]

After 1921, because of the intervention of the Labour leadership, and also because of the decline of unemployment from its 1921 peak, much of the militancy drained out of the agitation. There were no longer clashes with the police outside St. Peter's Hospital, and only occasionally street demonstrations. The unemployed were allied more closely with the Labour movement, but in their tactics and demands they retreated from the positions of 1921. The Labour Party succeeded very largely in making itself the spokesman of the unemployed, whether in the Guardians, the Council Chamber or in Parliament. There can be little doubt that the unemployed looked to the first two Labour M.P.s, Ayles and Baker, to provide a solution to their problems. The election

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1. W.D.P., 14 March 1923; B.T.M., 27 October 1923.
2. W.D.P., 27 January 1923.
3. W.D.P., 16 January 1922.

was won very largely on the issue of unemployment, and when Ayles left to take up his seat, he was escorted to the station by a procession of the unemployed.[1] At Westminster, Baker in particular was very active in pressing the claims of the unemployed and led a deputation of unemployed men from east Bristol to the Minister of Labour Margaret Bondfield to secure a revision of their cases under the Not Genuinely Seeking Work clause.[2] At the next General Election Baker, at least, increased his vote, due partly to his efforts on behalf of the unemployed, who still looked to him for assistance despite the failures of the Labour Government generally to come to terms with the unemployment issue, and despite especially their failure to repeal the Not Genuinely Seeking Work Clause. In east Bristol in particular, by 1924, the Labour Party had established itself as the main spokesman on behalf of the unemployed, but for the unemployed this was a change in tactics from the militancy of 1921 when they had been prepared to take initiatives on their own account.

The leadership thrown up by the unemployed themselves in the period 1919-21, regarded the two strategies of fighting the claims of the unemployed - through demonstrations, on the one hand, and through the Board of Guardians and the Council Chamber on the other - as complementary. Pressure on the Guardians and the City Council through street demonstrations was intended to lend weight to the efforts of the Labour minority within. But the support of the Labour councillors and Guardians for the claims of the unemployed was only given strictly on their own terms, and in line with their notions of constitutional propriety, within which there was no room for independent action by the

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1. W.D.P., 8 January 1924.
2. W.D.P., 22 May 1924; B.T.M., ibid.

unemployed themselves. Rather than leave themselves politically isolated, the unemployed abandoned their more militant tactics, and placed themselves in the hands of the Labour leadership. But in so doing they disarmed themselves in the face of increasing attacks on their conditions, which Labour's public representatives, because of their minority position, were powerless to prevent.

VIII) Housing

The housing issue was second in importance only to unemployment as a question on which the Labour Party made much political capital during the post-war period. A survey of the housing conditions in the city in 1923 estimated that there was a total shortage of some 8 - 10,000 houses in the City at that time.[1] This figure included some 5000 houses that were needed but did not actually exist, plus over 2000 slums that were totally unfit for human habitation. Bristol did not have a slum problem comparable to that of the northern industrial cities, but in some areas of the city living conditions were primitive in the extreme. The 1923 survey showed that Bedminster, St. Phillip's, St. George and the Central area of the city were still thoroughly unhealthy environments; tuberculosis, bronchitis and pneumonia, diseases which were closely associated with poverty and living conditions, were rife in these areas.[2] In 1927 The Times estimated that at least 25,000 people in Bristol were compelled to live in unfit accommodation, and noted that 'Within a short distance of the central streets of Bristol dwellings may be seen which could, without exaggeration, be described as hovels.'[3]

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1. Bristol's House Famine Campaign, (Bristol 1923).
2. ibid.
3. The Times, 27 October 1927.

Bad housing was almost exclusively a working class problem, and was, therefore, central to the Labour Party's thinking on social questions. But, as with unemployment, the Labour Party in Bristol did not treat housing as a class issue.[1] On unemployment the predominant view in the Labour Party was that it was a national, not a class issue, requiring joint efforts on the part of the employers, trade unions, churches and charities, not only to seek ways of providing more work, but also to mobilize, in Ayles' words, 'all the moral and educational resources of the city ... to assist in preventing ... the demoralizing effects', of being out of work.[2] The same sentiments informed its approach to the housing question. The self-help notions which had inspired the Shirehampton housing scheme during the war when the Dockers' Union attempted to sponsor the building of workers' housing were forgotten after the war.[3] The strategy of the Labour movement was to mobilize opinion in all sections of society to put pressure on the Government and local authorities to provide better housing. For the Labour attitude towards the question was fundamentally similar to that of the sympathetic middle class reformers; that whilst bad housing was the experience of

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1. By the term "class issue", is meant one where direct and immediate class interests were at stake, for it was one which derived directly from the inequities of the distribution of wealth and power in society, and which highlighted the need for a redistribution in favour of the working class. In terms of practical politics, for the Labour Party at the time, treating housing as a class issue might have involved advocating such policies as the nationalisation of land and the municipalisation of rented property. These were policies being discussed within the Labour Party nationally at the time.
2. W.D.P., 9 October 1923; B.T.M., ibid.
3. F. Sheppard papers, (in Bristol Record Office), file of Correspondence concerning the Shirehampton Housing Scheme. This was a scheme, which was sponsored by the Dockers' Union, to build low-cost housing at Shirehampton for Avonmouth dock workers. It was to be a co-operative venture, with help from state agencies. Only 150 of the planned 1200 houses were built and the scheme lapsed after the war.

the working class, and particularly of the poorest sections of the class, the effects of these conditions in terms of disease and of the fostering of crime, were the concern of all sections of society. Thus, although housing played a major part in the election campaigns of these years, and was a political issue which divided the parties, Labour organisations such as the Trades and Labour Council, the I.L.P., and the Co-operative Education Committee were not precluded from participating in the Bristol House Famine Campaign in 1923, which included representatives of the Liberals and the Conservatives, together with the charities, the B.A.I.R., and the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, in an attempt to put pressure on the Government to provide more state finance for the building of council houses in Bristol.[1] Participation in broad alliance campaigns of this type did not involve the Labour Party in abandoning its own distinctive policies on the housing question. Indeed, during the House Famine campaign a Labour Party pamphlet was issued outlining Labour's Vigorous Policy.[2] That policy contained heavy doses of state intervention and collectivism. The onus of responsibility for providing housing, it was argued, rested on the state through the local authorities. The purchase by the state of building materials in bulk, and their distribution in accordance with the needs of local authorities, the provision of municipal brickyards, and the building of council houses by the local authority employing direct labour were all elements of collectivism which were resisted by Labour's opponents. But the Labour Party was encouraged in putting forward these proposals by the fact that the state had accepted responsibility for providing housing under the 1919 Housing And Town Planning Act, and that

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1. Bristol's House Famine Campaign, (1923).
2. Bristol Labour Party, Bristol House Famine Campaign, Labour's Vigorous Policy, (Bristol 1923).

subsequent Housing Acts by the Tory and Labour Governments extended state intervention in housing.[1] Locally, under the Addison Act, and with F. Sheppard as Chairman of the Housing Committee, six sites were acquired in 1920 for housing development by the Corporation, and plans were drawn up for the provision of almost 6000 houses, some of which were to be built by direct labour.[2] Even among the virulently anti-socialist Liberals and Conservatives in Bristol there was some recognition of the need for state and local authority intervention into the important area of housing. By 1923 only some 1300 of the planned houses had actually been built, and the Labour Party was very critical of Government delays and failures to provide the necessary finance.[3]

During the 1923 general election campaign Labour candidates placed great stress on these Government failures. From the point of view of the Labour Party, the pace of development in house building was too slow. There were other issues which divided the Labour Party from its Liberal and Conservative opponents, notably the question of whether council housing should be built by direct labour or by private contractors. Yet the House Famine Campaign, in which all the major parties in Bristol co-operated in putting pressure on the Government to provide more funds for local council house building, indicated that there were important areas of consensus between the parties in Bristol. Once the state had accepted responsibility for providing housing, the issue was no longer whether the state should intervene, but the manner in which it should do so.

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1. B. Gilbert, op.cit., Ch.3.
2. B.T.M., 28 January 1920.
3. Bristol Labour Party, op.cit., 1923.

IX) Ideology

Labour's gains in votes and seats in the general elections of 1922 and 1923 were built, to a very great extent, on the issues of unemployment and housing, despite the party's ambivalent attitude to these questions. But what of the socialist programme that it had adopted in 1918, and which had been the basis on which it had asserted a new independence from the Liberal and Conservative parties? Of that, there was very little in evidence in the elections after 1918. Socialism, in terms of the Labour Party's political conception, meant Clause Four of the party constitution, calling for the common ownership of the means of production, under democratic control. This had been a central plank in the 1918 election manifesto; at none of the subsequent elections was it a major issue. Ayles was its most consistent advocate in Bristol, but he had omitted it from his platform by 1924. In east Bristol, Baker concentrated almost exclusively on the cause of the unemployed, particularly ex-servicemen, whom he championed in Parliament. Other Labour candidates were even more cool; this was especially true in the case of the middle class career politicians who were beginning to be adopted as Labour candidates in Bristol as early as 1922. Among these were Brigadier-General Thomson in Bristol Central, 1922,[1] J. A. Lovatt-Fraser, Central 1924,[2] and D. J. Vaughan who fought Bristol South in all three elections.[3] So conspicuous was the issue of public ownership by its absence from the election campaigns of 1922, 1923 and 1924, that when M. Giles, the local Secretary of the Workers' Union contested Bristol West in 1924, he felt it incumbent upon himself to point out that he

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1. W.D.P., 31 October 1922; Christopher Birdwood Thomson, b. 1875, who had a distinguished military career, culminating in appointment to the Supreme War Council 1918-19.
2. W.D.P., 14 October 1924; Lovatt-Fraser was a barrister.
3. W.D.P., 3 November 1922; Vaughan was a building contractor in South Wales, a Monmouthshire County Councillor, and prominent local preacher.

stood 'definitely as a socialist without camouflage, but also a strong supporter of the Labour Party and its programme.'[1]

Apart from their proposals on unemployment and housing, and their advocacy of free trade, the main domestic policy proposals put forward by Labour candidates was the capital levy, which was to be charged on unearned incomes as a means of reducing the national debt. But the levy had no socialistic implications; indeed, as MacDonald told a Bristol audience in 1923, it was ' ... not a question of socialism. It is a question of sound financial policy.'[2] The reduction of the national debt was regarded in orthodox financial circles as an essential preliminary to economic recovery, and the Labour Party offered the capital levy to the business and financial world as a solution to their problems. When the middle class voters registered their disapproval of the scheme, it was quietly dropped. As Lovatt-Fraser explained to a meeting at the Corn Exchange during the 1924 campaign that the Labour Party was '... waiting until the whole business world came round to the idea before it could again be considered practical politics.'[3]

In local politics, where the voice of the I.L.P. within the local movement could make itself felt on the policies presented to the electorate, public ownership continued to occupy an important place in the Labour platform. Ayles' 1912 pamphlet, Bristol's Next Step, was updated in 1923 by another of his publications, What a Socialist Town Council Would Do.[4] To the earlier proposals for municipal ownership of the trams, gas and water undertakings, he now added the idea of a municipal bank, on the lines of one already established in Birmingham, and the provision by the Corporation jointly with the Co-operative Society, of meat, milk and coal.

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1. W.D.P., 16 October 1924; B.T.M., ibid.
2. W.D.P., 21 November 1923; B.T.M., ibid.
3. W.D.P., 15 October 1924; B.T.M., ibid.
4. W. Ayles, What a Socialist Town Council Would Do, (London 1923).

Municipalisation thus remained an important issue in local elections and in Council debates. In particular, the take-over of the tramways was an important issue because the Corporation held an option to purchase which came up for renewal every seven years. In 1922 the Labour Party campaigned vigorously for municipal ownership, but although the Council's Option Committee recommended purchase, a full Council meeting rejected the proposal.[1] Locally, too, the Labour Party was at pains to emphasize that the proposals in its municipal election manifestoes were '... of a reform character, made necessary by a competitive system;' but 'we are definitely a socialist party, and our ultimate aim is a socialist commonwealth.'[2] But this rather abstract assertion of principles did not, nor was it intended to, guide the day to day work of the Labour representatives on the Council or the Guardians.

The Labour Party retreated from the radical programme of 1918. Many interpretations have been offered for this. For some, including many active in the movement at the time, it was the character of the Parliamentary Labour Party that was at fault. Brockway has recalled how many of the retired trade union officials who entered Parliament showed very little interest in socialist politics.[3] Others have tended to place the responsibility upon the middle class career politicians who were beginning to turn to the Labour Party as the Liberal party could no longer offer the same chance of access to high office. Both of these types were represented amongst the Labour candidates who contested Bristol seats at this time. But such explanations are far too simplistic. The retreat had much deeper roots; it can best be explained in terms of the

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1. W.D.P., September-October 1922; B.T.M., ibid.
2. B.T.M., 30 September 1926; This was the preface to annual Labour Party municipal manifestoes.
3. F. Brockway, op.cit., p.223.

very conception of what socialism meant and how it was to be brought about that was enshrined in the Labour Party constitution and programme of 1918. Theorists such as the Webbs, MacDonald, and Snowden saw socialism coming about not as a result of conflict between classes but as an administrative necessity, of which all the sane and reasonable elements in society, having been persuaded by the Labour Party, would sooner or later become conscious. It was to be a process of 'never-ending organic adaptation' by the institutions of society.[1] MacDonald described the process thus: 'Our socialists did not look on regarding the evidence of a collapse, but took their part in strengthening the tendencies for reconstruction. The municipalisation of gas and water was to be the first act in the drama which was to close with the nationalisation of the whole industrial capital of the country, and the triumph of socialism. For the conception of socialism was a simple one. Capitalism was to be transformed by the action of the state when controlled by socialists. This power of capitalism was to be limited, that service done by capitalism nationalised, until at last the world would awake to find between certain years it had undergone a revolution, and the caterpillar had become a butterfly.'[2]

In 1913 Snowden had taken heart from the fact that nationalisation proposals were '... now being put forward by men who repudiate all sympathy with socialism, but who see the practical value of these socialist schemes.'[3] The possibility of a broadly based collectivist consensus emerging in British political life was of major importance for the development of the Labour Party. The war threw the question of state intervention on a massive scale into the centre of politics,

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1. The phrase was MacDonald's.
2. R. MacDonald, Socialism, Critical and Constructive, (London 1921), p.64.
3. P. Snowden, Socialism and Syndicalism, (London 1913), p.160.

and wartime necessity appeared to be breaking down doctrinal barriers. The Labour Party threw itself into the war effort, particularly by collaborating in the second Coalition Government, at least in part as a means of strengthening and radicalising, and rendering permanent the collectivist consensus that appeared to be emerging. The 1918 constitution and programme were an assertion of independence, but on the basis of building on trends already established by the wartime Coalition, and of attempting to draw into the Labour movement those elements who subscribed to this new consensus.

In the post-war political climate, however, the machinery of wartime collectivism was rapidly dismantled, and the drive for a return to pre-war economic orthodoxy dealt a shattering blow to these illusions. The Coalition Government's refusal to act on the Sankey proposals, and the decision to decontrol the mines served notice on the Labour leadership that there was no collectivist consensus to radicalise. In their work, The Decay of Capitalist Civilisation, published in 1923, the Webbs registered their disappointment; 'Before the Great War,' they wrote, 'there seemed to be a substantial measure of consent that the social order had to be gradually changed in the direction of greater equality etc. ... We thought, perhaps wrongly, that this characteristic British acquiescence on the part of a limited governing class, in the rising claims of those who had found themselves excluded from both enjoyment and control, would continue and be extended, willingly or reluctantly, still further from the political into the industrial sphere; and that while progress might be slow, there would at least be no reaction.' But after the war, they lamented, everything fell into desuetude.[1] Labour's theorists had not expected to encounter resistance

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1. S. & B. Webb, The Decay of Capitalist Civilisation, (London 1923), pp.175-7.

to their nationalisation proposals; when they did, they had no alternative strategy. The aims of 1918 were abandoned, but the Labour Party was left without any systematic domestic policy, save its brief flirtation with the capital levy.

It would have formed no part of the Labour Party's conception of how change was to come about to appeal to those who could be expected to benefit from such changes to exert pressure, save by registering their votes at general elections. But even at elections workers were not appealed to to register their votes in favour of nationalisation. Such changes were to be brought about by the Labour Party nudging established institutions into adopting their proposals. It made no sense to appeal for a vote for nationalisation when those forces which were expected to acquiesce showed no intention of doing so. The working class had no special role to play in bringing about such change, for it was not a class issue, just as unemployment and housing were regarded as national, social and moral questions, the solution of which involved administrative and educational measures, rather than class issues.

Class struggle was explicitly rejected as a method of bringing about change. Nevertheless, Labour's theorists could hardly fail, especially in the context of the 1920s, to recognise that a class struggle was going on, and that they must take sides in that struggle. But, as one local pamphleteer, R. Neft,[1] of the I.L.P. pointed out, 'The socialists are not preaching the class struggle. They are merely drawing attention to it.'[2] MacDonald recognised the necessity for a defensive struggle, despite his lofty detachment from class conflict;

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1. For R. Neft, see Biographical Appendix, p. 399.
2. R. Neft, The Class Struggle, (Llanelly 1925).

when living standards were under attack, there was no alternative to resistance. But he denied any connection between a battle waged between two functions of the capitalist system, Capital and Labour, over sectional ends, and the movement for socialism. 'Capitalism,' he wrote, 'challenges Labour to fight a battle which, whatever side wins, can bring no victory, because in such a conflict of interests as this neither side is thinking of the true well-being of society.'[1] In the theoretical system of MacDonald class issues were morally and socially tainted by their connection with self-interest. Socialism, on the other hand, would come about through the transcending of narrow, sectional interests and the embracing by the Labour movement of wider, classless, national interests.

If socialism was not a class issue, it followed that the Labour Party was not a class party. This was a constant theme of Labour pamphlets and speeches. Thus MacDonald centred most of his election speeches around this theme. 'The Labour Party never was, and never can be, a mere class party. It is a party that gathers up in itself all the tendencies that society has given birth to for society's own regeneration and reconstruction.'[2] Neft echoed these sentiments: 'The Labour Party has long since emerged from the class party stage and is now a full-fledged national party.'[3] Such claims could be justified in terms of the class composition of the party in Bristol. There had been a small influx of middle class radicals into the I.L.P. and the Labour Party during the war. During the 1920s the Labour Party began to extend its organisation outside the working class areas into Clifton and Redland and the West division. A small but significant number of candidates at elections were of lower-middle and middle class origin, and this helped the Labour Party to project an image of classlessness.

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1. R. MacDonald, op.cit., p.27.
2. W.D.P., 22 October 1924; B.T.M., ibid.
3. R. Neft, op.cit.

In fact, this merely served to emphasise still further the extreme ambivalence of the relationship between the working class and the movement, and indeed between the Labour Party and the trade unions. For the Labour Party rested firmly on the financial support of the unions, and on the votes of working people, by an increasing number of whom it was regarded as their party. In attaching themselves to the Labour Party, either through membership, through payment of the political levy, or through voting support, workers expected it to project their demands and aspirations onto the political scene. They supported the party, in large measure because they expected it to challenge inequality, and to champion the claims of the poor against the rich. In many ways this was what the Labour Party did; its increased vote was achieved by promising better housing for workers and jobs for the unemployed, yet at the same time it was concerned to attract support from people of other classes.

The Capital Levy had a certain attraction as a method of taxing the rich. But for the Labour Party to have placed itself too stridently at the head of these forces would have struck at the very root of its whole political outlook, which depended on the possibility of fostering a new reforming consensus. Within the parliamentary framework, no consensus was possible if Parliament itself was turned into an arena of class conflict. Thus in raising the idea of the capital levy, or of nationalisation, and in championing the cause of the poor, the homeless or the unemployed, the Labour Party hastened to deny that it was engaging in class struggle. These were social problems, to be approached with compassion, Christian zeal, and state intervention. They were not issues which the poor, the homeless or the unemployed themselves ought to campaign about. 'Leave it to your representatives' was the advice most consistently offered by M.P.s and councillors to their supporters whenever the latter began to campaign on their own account. After 1921,

an increasing number of the 'disadvantaged' adopted this strategy. Perhaps, as Cowling has recently pointed out, the greatest achievement of the Labour Party in these years was to foster an attachment to parliamentary methods of achieving change, in the working class; and yet, in doing so, again in the words of Cowling, 'The Labour Party protected the ruling class by persuading the masses to support the parliamentary conflict through which inequality was sustained.'[1]

X) Possible Alternatives

It has already been seen that, at least until 1921, the parliamentary strategy was not the only possible one in the eyes of many workers. Some kind of alternative, loosely described as direct action, appeared to be a possibility. It is clear that among the trades union officials and those on the political wing of the movement who supported direct action, the concept was limited to the use of industrial strength as a means of pressurising the Government into making concessions. It was not conceived as a method of taking power. It is not clear that among the rank and file of the movement the potentialities and limitations of direct action had been assessed with this degree of articulation, although it is certainly true that among the organised workers there was very little disposition to rely solely on the possibilities for change presented to them at elections through the Labour Party. Their industrial strength occupied an important place in their consciousness, and this perhaps offered the only chance of the movement developing in another direction, under a different leadership.

Alternative strategies and alternative leadership would have had to be based on alternative activity and alternative organisation. Of the first, there was no lack in the unions. Much of the strike activity,

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1. M. Cowling, The Impact of Labour, (Cambridge 1971), p.7.

even before 1921, was unofficial and in defiance of union instructions. Six of the seven dock strikes in Bristol in the period 1919 to 1924 were unofficial.[1] Most were small scale affairs, but in 1923 the T.G.W.U. found itself challenged by stoppages in all the major ports which lasted ten days or more.[2] Even Bevin's intervention, despite his high standing among local dock workers, failed to persuade the men to return. But the frustrations with union officials did not crystallise into a more thoroughgoing, sustained, rank and file movement which could serve as the base for an alternative leadership. The dockers had no workplace organisation outside the official union structure. Among the engineers, on the other hand, a work place organisation had developed around the shop stewards in many workshops in Bristol. But there were no instances of unofficial strikes by engineers. In Bristol, shop stewards, even during the war, had but rarely acted outside the union structure, and in 1919 this incorporation of the stewards had been consolidated when the union and employers had reached agreement setting out the stewards' place within the negotiating system. Moreover unemployment deprived workplace representatives of their ability to initiate action. The lock-out of 1922 dealt a crippling blow to shop floor organisation in particular.

Only among the seamen did something approaching a sustained rank and file challenge to the policies of the bureaucracy develop. Havelock Wilson's N.S.F.U. had, over the years, been transformed from a fighting organisation into one that practised the most extreme form of accommodation with the employers. In 1917 this development was strengthened with the formation of the National Maritime Board, a form

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1. Only the dock strike of February 1924 was official.
2. W.D.P., 3-13 July 1923; B.T.M., ibid.

of joint regulatory machinery, and the institution of the system of joint supply, whereby the supply of labour was to be controlled jointly by the N.S.F.U. and the Shipping Federation.[1] The position of the N.S.F.U. was thus assured, not through its membership strength, but through agreement with the employers. Wilson's accommodation with the employers gradually turned into an alliance against militancy amongst seamen, and resulted in a failure by the N.S.F.U. to protect its members' interests. By the time the union demanded its first post-war wage increase in July 1920, the employers were already beginning to think in terms of wage cuts. They had very little difficulty in persuading Wilson of the need for cuts and early in 1921 the N.M.B. agreed to an all-round reduction of £2.10s. per month. The Cooks and Stewards' Union, however, struck in protest, but although there was some response in Bristol, the resistance was generally weak and the strike collapsed.[2]

Evidence of discontent within the N.S.F.U. was provided by the unofficial strike of seamen in November 1920, when the demand was frequently made that Wilson should present himself to the rank and file.[3] The total lack of resistance to wage cutting in 1921 widened the breach within the union. The unofficial strike committee of 1920 formed itself into a more permanent rank and file body, the Seamen's Vigilance Committee, but stressed at this stage that they were 'not out to break up the union, but to build it into a real fighting machine.'[4] To this end they advocated the election of all officials, and weekly branch meetings to keep the members in touch. The resignation of Havelock Wilson was at the top of their list of demands. Subscriptions were

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1. B. Mogridge, 'Militancy and Inter-Union rivalries 1911-1929', in: International Review of Social History, Vol. 6, 1961, pp.388-390.
2. G. A. Phillips, op.cit., pp.382-5.
3. B.T.H., 27 November - 11 December 1920.
4. W.D.P., 11 August 1921.

withheld by supporters of the Committee until their demands were met. The Vigilance Committee appears to have mobilised considerable support among the seamen in Bristol. It began issuing its own contribution cards, and collecting subscriptions, thus operating as a union within a union;[1] in September 1921 it claimed that two-thirds of Bristol seamen were supporters. Initially, all its energies were devoted to transforming the N.S.F.U., and a campaign was built around the battle to be launched at the union's annual conference in September, which included demands for one big union of all seafarers, for officials to be paid the same as the members, and for a restoration of the recent wage cut.[2]

At the conference the Vigilance Committee suffered a defeat. They began to think in terms of fighting outside the N.S.F.U., and so the N.T.W.F. promoted an amalgamation between the Cooks' and Stewards' Union and the British Seafarers' Union as a challenge to the policies being imposed upon seamen by the N.S.F.U.[3] The Amalgamated Marine Workers' Union formally came into existence on January 1st, 1922.[4] In October 1921 the Seamen's Vigilance Committee advised its supporters to join the new union, for this represented, to them, the ideal of the one big union, as the best opportunity that was open to them of resisting the combined attacks of the Shipping Federation and the N.S.F.U.[5]

The seamen's struggle evoked a sympathetic response from wide sections of the Labour movement. Dockers expressed their support, unemployed leaders appeared on the Vigilance Committee platforms, and the Trades Council pledged its support.[6] Weekly meetings were addressed

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1. W.D.P., 17 September 1921.
2. ibid.
3. G. A. Phillips, op.cit., p.385.
4. Mogridge, op.cit., pp.392-6.
5. B.T.M., 19 December 1921.
6. B.T.M., 28 January 1922.

by an array of officials from other unions, including Gill of the miners, Parker of the Trades Council, Schofield of N.U.D.A.W., and Berriman and Milton of the I.L.P. But the difficulties facing the new union were immense. The high level of unemployment effectively dampened militancy. Moreover, the joint supply was tightened up in 1922 with the introduction of form P.C.5, which had to be signed by both N.S.F.U. and Federation representatives, and without which no man would be employed on a British ship.[1] Resistance from seamen to this new imposition prevented it from becoming fully operative, especially among the better-organised sections who could refuse to sign. But the P.C.5 nevertheless curtailed support for the A.M.W.U., and when that union issued a strike call in March 1923 there was no response in Bristol.[2]

During 1925, however, the A.M.W.U. enjoyed a brief revival, after the N.S.F.U. agreed to another wage cut. In August the A.M.W.U. called a national strike against the cut, and members in Avonmouth and Bristol joined, together with some members of the N.S.F.U.[3] The Trades Council declared its solidarity, and appealed to other unions for financial support. The N.S.F.U.'s response was to bring in strike breakers from other ports, and after five weeks the strike had collapsed.[4] This fiasco effectively marked the end of the A.M.W.U. and resistance to the N.S.F.U.'s policies in Bristol. In January 1926 the Marine Worker was complaining that there was no resistance to 'the control and domination of the bullies and blackguards of the shipowners' representatives, the officials of the N.S.F.U.'[5]

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1. Mogridge, op.cit., p.398.
2. ibid., p.400.
3. ibid., pp.402-4.
4. B.T.M., 2 September - 14 October 1925; W.D.P., 1 September - 20 October 1925.
5. The Marine Worker, January 1926.

Thus ended the only serious and sustained attempt by rank and file trades unionists in Bristol to challenge the policies of their union leadership. Even in this instance Bristol was not a major centre of activity; the leadership of the movement was provided by the more militant ports of Clydeside and Southampton. But the episode sheds some interesting light on the relationship between officials and the rank and file. We have seen above how, to a certain extent, officials of all unions at this time were being drawn into joint regulatory procedures similar to those of the National Maritime Board; on the docks, the registration system operated jointly by the T.G.W.U. and the employers differed only slightly in the actual mechanics of its operation from the joint supply system adopted by the shipping industry. Moreover, the participation of union officials in these arrangements involved them in the exercise of quasi-managerial discipline in much the same way as the N.S.F.U. officials. But the struggle of the seamen against Havelock Wilson evoked a sympathetic response not only among rank and file dockers, but also in the Trades Council and the I.L.P., and among some sections of the local trade union bureaucracy. It is true that Bevin had no sympathy with the A.M.W.U., as Shinwell, one of its officials, has testified,[1] and this may well have restrained T.G.W.U. officials from expressing sympathy with the seamen, despite their undoubted opposition to the policies of Havelock Wilson.

But there were important differences between Bevin and Wilson, and between the officials of the N.S.F.U. and those of most other unions. Although they had entered into arrangements with the employers which distorted their relationship with the rank and file, they had not, for

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1. E. Shinwell, I've Lived Through It All, (1973).

the most part, accepted the ideology of industrial peace. And it was this vital area of ideological independence which enabled these officials to retain a certain amount of flexibility, and to lead struggles when pressure from their members or the attitude of employers, made no other course possible. Wilson had abandoned his independence in this area, and thus had abandoned his ability to lead struggles; he thus fell back ever more desperately on mutual co-operation with the employers to protect the position of his union. It was this which gave such offence to the officials of other unions and encouraged them to identify with the rank and file seamen.[1]

Paradoxically, their intervention helped to turn the protest movement from a genuinely rank and file body into one controlled by full time officials. As trade unionists they were as offended as were the rank and file by the lengths to which Wilson would go to preserve close relations with the employer, but they could not conceive of trades union activity except under the direction of full-time officials. Yet neither could the majority of the rank and file, except on the occasions when they were prepared to take a specific course of action in defiance of union policy. For in a situation such as obtained in the 1920s, when full-scale confrontations were frequent occurrences, and in which not only wages and conditions, but the organisations themselves were under attack, there was a closing of the ranks behind the official organisation.

Sporadic unofficial activity alone could not provide a base for the emergence of an alternative leadership offering an alternative strategy, for although by such means workers frequently expressed their frustrations not only with their situation in life, but also with their

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1. Wilson was later to be found, after the general strike, encouraging miners to join the ultra-collaborationist 'Spencerist' union.

own leadership, their grievances did not reach a sufficient level of generality that would lead them to break decisively with that leadership. Nor was there any real alternative offered to them. The I.L.P. frequently clashed with the more conservative elements among the trades union bureaucracy, but failed to draw links between its conflicts within the Labour Party and those of rank and file trade unionists. Its intervention in strikes was strictly at the behest of the local officials of the unions involved. On industrial questions the local I.L.P. favoured the policies of the Guild Socialists but did not campaign in the local movement for these ideas.[1] Two guild socialist schemes were launched in Bristol in 1922 - in the furniture trade in April,[2] and in the Building industry.[3] Nothing more was heard of the furniture guild after June, although it is known that the building guild at least attempted to win contracts. But, particularly in the circumstances of 1922, such schemes were utopian and made little impact on the Bristol movement.

There remained the Communist Party. Formed in August 1920 as an amalgam of the B.S.P. and the S.L.P. and other left-wing and syndicalist elements, the party inherited a strong industrial base from the engineering shop stewards' movement. From the beginning a major part of the C.P. strategy was to build rank and file movements in the unions in opposition to the conservatism of many of the leaders. In 1924 this strategy resulted in the formation of the Minority Movement, with branches in various industries. In areas where rank and file movements had taken root, the Minority Movement, and through it the C.P., enjoyed considerable

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1. I.L.P., Mins., 19 January, 12 July, 24 December 1916.
2. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Report, April 1922.
3. The only evidence of its activities is a tender made by the Guild for work to be done at I.L.P. offices, Kingsley Hall in 1922.

support.[1] In Bristol, however, the lack of any tradition of independent rank and file organisation was a crucial factor both in the development of the Minority Movement and of the C.P. The Bristol branch was formed in 1922 by the Manchester engineer, W. Hayman.[2] There were references to Communist activity in the unemployed movement in the autumn of 1921, and Hayman appears to have been active in those events. In the 1921 Municipal Elections a so-called Communist candidate contested the St. Philip and Jacob North ward, although he does not appear to have been an official C.P. candidate.[3]

Early progress was slow. W. Paxton, a member of A.S.L.E.F., was the only employed trade unionist among the original group of five or six, and this limited the trade union work that could be done, although there was a certain amount that could be achieved on the Trades Council, to which both Hayman and Paxton were delegates.[4] By 1926 the membership had increased to not more than twenty or thirty, and the C.P.'s main orientation in the early years was towards work in the Labour Party. The C.P. was consistently refused the right to affiliate to the Labour Party, but this did not prevent individual trade unionists from gaining the right to represent their union branch in the constituency Labour Parties, and at the B.L.P. As both Paxton and Hayman were elected to the B.L.P., and the latter secured nomination for the executive, the Labour Party was not an entirely unfruitful field of work for the communists. Among rank and file Labour Party members, communists were welcomed for a number of reasons. There was considerable sympathy for

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1. R. Martin, Communism and British Trade Unions, (1971), ch.3.
2. Conversation with W. Paxton, ex-founder member of Bristol local group of C.P., 1922, ex-A.S.L.E.F.
3. W.D.P., November 2 1021.
4. Conversation with W. Paxton.

the Russian revolution, and therefore, by association, for the C.P.G.B. There was, too, a desire for unity, and the fact that the C.P. members proved to be among the most active Labour Party members, particularly during election campaigns, encouraged this view. Lastly, there was within the Labour Party a certain awareness of the conservatism of the parliamentary leadership, and of the local party hierarchy, and the C.P. were regarded as a useful ginger group inside the Labour Party.[1]

The 1925 Liverpool conference resolutions, purging the communists from the Labour Party's ranks, destroyed the comparatively easy-going acceptance of the C.P. within the Labour Party.[2] In accordance with these decisions C.P. members were removed from the B.L.P., and moves were made to purge them from ward and constituency parties. Only in east Bristol was there resistance to these moves. In December 1925 the Bristol East C.L.P. decided not to adhere to the Liverpool decisions. Several speakers in the debate stressed the Labour Party's need for a left wing to stop the slide away from socialist policies. 'The party,' said W. Winchester,' was becoming too liberal in outlook, and had settled down to the same professionalism that had ruined that party. This was against the interests of the rank and file.'[3] Another member appealed to more basic class instincts; 'If the constitution was wide enough for Lords and Ladies, it was wide enough for communists,' he said.

These arguments initially carried the day. But the matter was not allowed to rest there, and later in the month the party received a letter from the national agent, threatening it with 'serious consequences' if it did not rescind its decision.[4] A motion to this effect was moved

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1. Conversation with W. Paxton.
2. E. Wertheimer, Portrait of the Labour Party, (1929), pp.33-35.
3. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 2 December 1925.
4. ibid., 16 December 1925.

in January 1925, supported by the secretary and agent, Rogers, and by the South West Regional Organiser. They argued that majority decisions of conference should be respected, and that the presence of communists in the party threatened it with serious damage during elections. The Bristol East C.L.P. was persuaded to reverse its decision, and during the rest of 1926 communists were expelled from the various sections of the Labour Party in which they had been operating.[1]

XI) The General Strike

The failures of the 1924 Labour Government raised yet again the question of the role of parliamentary or trade union action. Throughout the Labour movement there was a renewed interest in the potentialities of trade union action. The 'Back to the Unions' campaign, and the mooting of plans for a new Industrial Alliance, reflected this trend.[2] The 1925 T.U.C. congress indicated a strong leftwards inclination among large sections of the trade union movement. At the same time, the competitive position of British industry worsened, and a renewed offensive against wages and conditions was begun. As in 1921, so in 1925, it was the miners who were the first to be attacked, but the response of the trade union movement, and the unpreparedness of the Government for a long struggle, produced a different result. Red Friday, to a very great extent, expunged the memory of the Black Friday defeat, and placed the question of a general strike once again on the agenda.

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 13 January 1926.
2. A. Hutt, The Post-War History of the British Working Class, (1937).

The Labour movement was not entirely unprepared for the crisis which exploded in May 1926. Throughout April there had been attempts to prepare the movement emotionally and politically for the struggle ahead. On 31st March the Trades Council organised a meeting addressed by Hicks of the General Council, Cook of the miners, and Berriman of the local I.L.P.[1] Berriman reminded the movement at large of the need for solidarity with the miners, and the dangers of splitting the movement into two wings, thus dissipating its forces. The tone of speeches at the half-yearly conference of the Labour Party later in the month was militant and defiant, and the conference expressed its support for the stand being taken by the miners.[2]

In 1926 the Government was ready to take on the trades union movement, and, despite the attempts of the T.U.C. General Council at mediation, forced a confrontation upon it. Thus, trade union leaders who had no belief in the general strike,[3] and feared the consequences of entering upon such a course of action, nevertheless found themselves caught in the middle of the sharpest class conflict ever seen in Britain. By 4th May, when the strike notices took effect, the 2000 Bristol miners were already locked out. They were joined at first by dockers, railwaymen, road transport and building workers, who came out with enthusiasm. Later printing workers, electrical power station workers, and finally engineers entered the fray, and by the time the strike was called off, some 36,000 were on strike,[4] in Bristol. For the Central Strike Committee (C.S.C.) this was not enough. They continually urged on the T.U.C. the need to call out gasworkers, and, on 10th May wrote

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1. W.D.P., 1 April 1926.
2. W.D.P., 12 April 1926.
3. C. T. Cramp, of N.U.R., later told T.U.C. Conference: 'I do not believe in a General Strike. I have never believed in a General Strike to achieve something positive;' (T.U.C./G.C., Report on Proceedings of National Strike, Special Conference, January 1927).
4. Bristol Trades Council, Report to T.U.C. Information Department, 11 May 1926, (T.U.C. Library).

to the General Council that '... the time has come when we must take even more strenuous measures to show the Government that our people are with us, and (the C.S.C.) have agreed unanimously to call out everyone except those services which are essential for the community - hospitals, corporation workers, water works, etc.'[1]

There were blackspots. The Douglas motor-cycle works kept working, as did the local press, 'though with a much reduced staff, and only limited editions could be produced.[2] The tramways, too, reminded trade unionists of the weakness of their organisation in some areas when an almost normal service was maintained. But, despite these instances, there was no sign of weakening when the strike was called off. The A.E.U. Organising District Delegate wrote later that 'We were in a strong position on the 12th.'[3] The only significant return to work, it seemed, had been in the printing trades, whilst right through the strike, more and more groups of workers were joining in.

There had been no detailed plans drawn up before the strike for its organisation. But the local movement showed a capacity for spontaneous self-organisation. On the evening of 3rd May a special delegate meeting of the Trades Council met to draw up plans, and decided to set up a Central Strike Committee, representative of the Trades Council and of the Strike Committees of the unions involved.[4] Special sub-committees were set up to deal with communications and publicity. A system was devised for conveying messages speedily from the centre to all points of the city by bicycle. The publicity committee was responsible for issuing bulletins.

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1. Bristol Trades Council, Report to T.U.C. Information Dept., 10 May 1926, (T.U.C. Library).
2. W.D.P., 3-12 May; B.T.M., ibid.
3. A.E.U., Monthly Journal, June 1926.
4. W.D.P., 4 May 1926.

The Government had laid its plans for the confrontation very carefully. On 30th April, a State of Emergency was declared, and the Civil Commissioners took up their posts in their respective regions.[1] The Bristol Central Library was commandeered as a recruiting station for strike breakers, and over 7770 enrolled in the city during the course of the strike.[2] Many were set to work at the docks and the power station, and driving trains. Behind them stood the forces of the state. No troops were moved into the town, but two warships were sent in, one to the City Docks, the other to Avonmouth, and naval ratings were used to get shipping in and out of the docks, and to guard the power station.[3]

It was partly this show of force which unnerved the General Council. But the reason they called off the strike unconditionally, without having won any concessions, was their realisation of the implications of what they were doing. It was not that they feared the failure of the strike. Rather that they feared its success. The Government played on these fears through its use of the issue of the threat to the constitution, and the political nature of the strike, and succeeded in convincing sufficient of the Council that to defeat the Government by unconstitutional means would be a dangerous, revolutionary act. Once the plea that they were merely engaged in an industrial dispute had been shown to be false, their retreat was inevitable.

What of the political wing of the movement during these events? In order to maintain the illusion that the strike was industrial, the trade union leadership was determined that the Labour Party and the I.L.P. should play no more than a passive role in the struggle. The union leaderships' opposition to political intervention effectively

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1. P. Renshaw, The General Strike, (1975), ch.13.
   The story of the General Strike can also be followed in:
   C. Farman, The General Strike, (1972), and in a number of more recent studies; viz: M. Morris, The General Strike, (1976); G. Noel, The Great Lockout of 1926, (1976); J. Skelley, ed., The General Strike, 1926, (1976).
   Morris and Skelley, in particular, contain valuable local studies which can be used for comparison.
2. W.D.P., 18 May 1926.
3. W.D.P., 6 May 1926.

emasculated any desire on the part of the political wing of the movement to play an active role in spreading the strike, and coming to grips with its implications. In Bristol the I.L.P. and the East C.L.P. placed their premises at the disposal of the strike committee,[1] but the Bristol North C.L.P. postponed all its open-air meetings for the duration of the strike.[2] It was not the time, it seemed, for political work. Yet the Constituency and Parliamentary Labour Parties, and the I.L.P., were, for the most part, happy to accept this role, and the interpretation placed upon the strike by the General Council. To have done otherwise would have been to undermine the whole orientation of the party towards parliamentary methods of bringing about change.

The Communist Party, for its part, was too weak to affect the course of events. At the time of the General Strike it had about twenty to thirty members, very few of whom were employed trade unionists. During the course of the strike, the local group of the C.P. issued a daily bulletin, the 'Bristol Fighter', copies of which have survived.[3] The orientation of the Communist Party over the period prior to the General Strike had undergone something of a change from the policy of building an independent rank and file leadership through the Minority Movement. The C.P.'s line at the time of the strike was reliance on the left-wing of the General Council to prevent any retreat. 'All Power to the General Council' was the C.P.'s main slogan at this time. Accordingly, during the General Strike, the Bristol Fighter failed to draw out the implications of the struggle. And when the left-wing of the General Council joined with the rest in urging the miners to accept defeat, the C.P.'s policy was in ruins.

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., May 1926; I.L.P. Mins., April 1927.
2. Bristol North C.L.P., G.C. Mins., May 1926.
3. The Bristol Fighter, Bulletin of the Bristol Local Group of C.P.G.B., Nos. 1-5, 7-8; 5-16 May 1926.

There was no immediate return to work after the strike was called off. At first there was confusion, and the C.S.C. was unsure whether to hail the 'settlement' as a victory or defeat.[1] When it became clear that the unions had suffered a crushing defeat, there was no immediate disillusionment. The emotions were much more those of anger, and there was considerable support for the miners' stand at a mass meeting on 16th May.[2] Moreover, as employers attempted to take advantage of the situation and impose new terms of employment, the strike continued in many industries. When the railwaymen presented themselves for work they were asked to sign a document admitting to having broken their contracts of service.[3] A national agreement secured their return a few days later. Dockers and road transport workers also refused to accept their employers' new terms, and demanded that all blacklegs should be removed from the docks.[4] They held out for a further week until Bevin intervened in the negotiations and secured a settlement in which the union agreed not to engage in sympathetic strike action again.[5]

The miners resisted wage cuts for another six months. Deprived of the support of other trade unionists, they nevertheless refused to accept the owners' terms. Such money as was available came from the collections undertaken by the C.L.P.s and the Bristol Council of Christian Churches.[6] But collections could not sustain the struggle indefinitely, and in November and December the miners were literally starved back to work. The owners would allow no negotiations. All the points that the miners had been holding out against - district agreements, longer hours, and reduced wages - they now had to accept. The return to work by Bristol miners began in the last week of November, and the last colliery re-opened in mid-December.[7]

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1. W.D.P., 13 May 1926; The C.S.C.'s statement read: 'It is difficult, in the absence of the terms of settlement, to attempt to sum up the situation, and, as at the early call for a strike, the men are relying on the integrity of their leaders.'
2. W.D.P., 17 May 1926; B.T.M., ibid.
3. W.D.P., 14 May 1926; B.T.M., ibid.
4. W.D.P., 14 May 1926.
5. W.D.P., 20 May 1926.
6. W.D.P., 8 June 1926; 11 June 1926.
7. W.D.P., 10 December 1926; B.T.M., ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

The Aftermath of the General Strike

I) Bristol's inter-war economy

Over the period covered by this thesis the British economy underwent massive upheavals and far-reaching structural changes. The wartime and post-war boom, in which the capacity of certain industries was artificially and temporarily inflated, gave way in 1920/21 to a slump the like of which had never before been witnessed. Recovery was slow and half-hearted during the mid-1920s, and the economy collapsed into slump again during the period of the second Labour government of 1929 to 1931. The depression of the early 1930s struck with particular ferocity at the traditional staple export industries on which Britain's 19th century prosperity had been based. Unemployment reached record levels, but the picture was not altogether bleak. In areas such as the South East and the Midlands, home of the newer industries producing consumer goods for a home market, there was relative prosperity, and industrial expansion.

Bristol shared in these trends. The 1921 census figures showing occupations reflect some of the changes that were wrought by the war. In war-related industries, such as engineering and transport, total employment had increased since 1911, whereas in the building, and food, drink and tobacco industries, there had been some decline. This was also the experience of the boot and shoe, and clothing industries for, although they expanded during the war, depression had hit them relatively early.[1]

This depression brought further changes in the structure of the labour force. Employment in mining almost disappeared, to a figure of

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1. Census of England and Wales, 1921, Gloucester County Report.

675 in 1931, and the boot and shoe, clothing and furniture industries suffered significant reductions in employment. The engineering and metal group declined slightly between 1921 and 1931, but the printing and paper, tobacco and chocolate industries all had larger workforces in 1931 than they had had ten years earlier. Employment for males in the transport and communications trades had dropped from 19,885 in 1921 to 16,339 in 1931.[1]

Over the period as a whole there was a significant increase in employment in commercial, financial and clerical occupations. In 1911 there had been 2591 males and 2314 females employed in Government and Local Government; 5358 males and 1534 females were classified as clerks, and 4625 males were employed in commerce, accountancy and banking. The 1921 and 1931 figures are not strictly comparable with those of 1911, because of changes in classification, and because the lower age limit was raised progressively from 10 to 12 to 14. But that there was a long-term increase in white-collar employment is clear. The commercial, financial and insurance group in 1921 numbered some 12,686 males and 5725 females, raising it to second place in the table of male occupations, behind the transport and communication group. Of these, 3196 males and 4011 women were shop assistants, who were included amongst other trades, notably the food, drink and tobacco group, in the 1911 census. There were also, in 1921, some 7356 males and 4954 females employed as clerks, draughtsmen and typists, together with 3476 and 548 respectively in public administration and defence.

By 1931 the commercial, finance and insurance group had increased to 18071 males and 6960 females. The increase in male employment within

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1. Census of England and Wales, 1931, Industry Tables.

this group was particularly noticeable; there was very little increase in the number of shop assistants. The clerks, draughtsmen and typists had grown to 9984 men and 6587 women. Thus during this period white-collar occupations became a major source of employment, particularly for men.

These figures reflect the changes in the local industrial structure. Engineering, boot and shoe manufacture and transport increased during the war, but found themselves in possession of a vastly inflated capacity in the more hostile economic climate after 1920. Some local industries almost disappeared completely during the depression, particularly those outposts of the heavy staple industries. There was a progressive reduction in the number of coal mines operating in the area. South Liberty pit in Bedminster closed in 1924, followed in later years by four more pits, so that in 1939 only Coalpit Heath mine remained in production.[1] The cotton factory closed in 1925.[2] Never very prosperous even at the best of times, these industries were the first to feel the cold draught of the inter-war depression. Shipbuilding, also, continued its decline and dwindled almost to nothing.

The depression in the South Wales coalfield was felt in the Bristol boot and shoe, clothing, and furniture industries. Kingswood boot manufacturers experienced their worst period ever, and many firms, particularly in the heavy boot section of the trade, collapsed. Some firms survived, by switching production to fashionable ladies' footwear, but generally the manufacturers' response was inadequate. Wages were forced down, and working conditions deteriorated, but there was insufficient technical innovation, and the scale of operations remained

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1. B. Little, op.cit., p.298.
2. ibid., p.259.

small. Some firms succeeded in taking advantage of new market opportunities, and expanded, although rationalisation and mechanisation in general brought reduced employment opportunities. At the same time, the changes in technique were achieved through an expansion of the female labour force at the expense of male workers.[1]

Other industries, such as tobacco, chocolate and printing and packaging tended to fare better. The latter's fortunes were intimately linked to those of local and national commodity producers, and to the extent that their customers were able to expand, the printing and packaging firms grew also. Robinson's, for example, opened a new factory at Fishponds in 1920, which was planned as a model of efficient, rational production. It was highly mechanised, and employed a large proportion of unskilled and female labour.[2] Robinson's also expanded their local interests in 1932 when a paper mill was opened by the group in Keynsham.[3]

The tobacco industry fared relatively well during the inter-war years, being able to expand production as a result of increasing demand in the new growth areas. Total tobacco sales fell somewhat between 1920 and 1924, but thereafter the increase in cigarette sales, which were increasingly coming to dominate the market, restored Wills' fortunes.[4] Woodbine sales grew steadily during the 1920s, although at a slower rate than in the previous ten years. But Wills, as a result of increasing oligopolistic competition, tended to fare worse than the industry as a whole. Sales were affected by the slump of 1931-2, but only temporarily.

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1. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Reports, passim.
2. E. Liveing, op.cit.
3. B. Darwin, op.cit.
4. B. Alford, op.cit., pp.336-348.

The relative prosperity of the Wills company, and of those linked to it, was in stark contrast to the decline experienced by other industries. It had important consequences for the tobacco workers. In 1920, when wages generally were still rising, Wills workers received an increase that brought the minimum rate for unskilled males at age 21 to 74s. per week, and that for females at the same age, to 44s. 6d. per week. These were relatively high rates for unskilled work. Moreover, there was no attempt by the company to reduce wages or benefits during the inter-war period, and over the period as a whole the unskilled male employee on maximum earnings, received 23% more than the national average wage.[1] At a time of generally falling prices this brought comparative prosperity to these workers, setting them apart from others who were subject to wage-cutting. Furthermore, it was company policy not to dismiss workers at times of falling sales, and although there was some short-time working during the early 1920s, there were no redundancies, despite evidence of overmanning. Again, this experience contrasted markedly to that of workers in other industries where redundancy was a common response to economic crisis on the part of employers.

Of the other local commodity producers, Fry's did not fare as well as Wills during the inter-war period. There were some wage reductions during the early 1920s, and in 1932 the company introduced a longer working week.[2] But these attacks on workers' wages and conditions were mild in comparison with other industries. There is no evidence regarding conditions in the large printing and packaging firms. Engineering in Bristol tended to fare relatively well, partly because of its links with local commodity producers, and partly because other products were

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1. B. Alford, op.cit., p.376.
2. See below, pp. 278-280.

developed for which there was an expanding market. The production of vehicles and aircraft reflected a shift in emphasis for a large part of the local engineering industry. The Douglas firm at Kingswood illustrated these trends. Originally a small family firm producing machinery for boot and shoe manufacture, it turned its attention at the turn of the century to the production of motor cycles, utilising the most modern production methods. During the war, as a result of government orders, the company grew rapidly. After 1918, Douglas Brothers underwent a number of changes of ownership linking it with larger combines such as Aero-Engines Ltd., and shifted its attention towards the production of aero-engines which, during the rearmament boom of the 1930s, became its mainstay.[1]

The Bristol Tramways Company produced its own vehicles at a works in Brislington. In 1910, an offshoot company, the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company, was founded with a works at Filton.[2] Wartime demand for aircraft brought enormous expansion, and henceforth the aircraft industry was established as a major growth point in the local economy. And just as with the Douglas Company, but now on a much larger scale, a major sector of the Bristol engineering industry developed and grew independently of the local commodity producers.

After the war the industry faced the problem of an inflated capacity at a time of reduced peacetime demand for aircraft. The company, however, was more prosperous than many other aircraft producers during this lean period, partly because it was able to supplement its production of aircraft with that of bus and coach bodies for the Bristol Tramways Company. At the same time, it concentrated on technical developments particularly on

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1. E. Liveing, op.cit.; Who's Who in Bristol (Labour Research Dept. 1935).
2. C. H. Barnes, Bristol Aircraft since 1910, (1964), pp.28-38.

the all-metal airframe which came into operational use in the later 1930s. The aero-engine side of the business was expanded, and a large new factory for this purpose was built at Patchway in 1936. This made the Filton-Patchway site the largest single aircraft manufacturing unit in the world before 1939. Of particular importance in this expansion was the rearmament boom which began in 1935. Indeed, a large part of the industrial recovery in Bristol during these years was based on the expansion of the aircraft industry.

Finally, mention must be made of the changes in ownership. It has been seen that even before 1910 there were strong elements of monopoly and oligopoly within local industry, and that the Imperial Tobacco Company was a prime example of this trend. During the inter-war period the trend towards monopoly was a prominent feature. Thus the Fry's company was amalgamated with Cadburys in 1918.[1] The large local commodity producers extended their interests into the local engineering industry. In 1920, Robinson's took over Strachan and Henshaws, producers of printing and paper machinery,[2] and in the same year the Imperial Tobacco Company, jointly with the British American Tobacco Company, acquired a majority share in Brecknell, Munro and Rogers, who possessed a licence to reproduce a new and advanced American Tobacco machine.[3] Lysaghts, which owned a galvanising plant in Bristol, was part of the Guest, Keen and Nettleford combine.[4] Unilever had interests not only in local soap manufacture, but also in oil and cake mills at Avonmouth.[5] The Bristol Tramways Company was a combine within a combine. It acquired

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1. I. A. Williams, The Firm of Cadbury, (1931), p.84.
2. B. Darwin, op.cit.
3. B. Alford, op.cit., p.370.
4. Who's Who in Bristol.
5. ibid.

control over a number of smaller local bus and tram operators, but was itself linked, through the Western National Omnibus Company, and the National Omnibus and Transport Company, with the giant Tilling group.[1] The trend away from family control could have led to increasingly impersonal management structures which might have been expected to increase friction and, therefore, the possibilities for trade union action in these companies. In some cases in Bristol, however, notably the firms of Fry's, Wills and Robinson's, the continuing traditions of paternalistic management mitigated this trend.

II) Trade Union Membership

The defeat of the general strike, and of the ensuing long miners' struggle, left the trade union movement lacking in confidence and combativity, bitterly divided among its leaders, and without a coherent view of its own direction. No longer were the unions regarded as a possible vehicle of change, although the question of whether they could perform this function had not in fact been settled by the strike. The strike had been called off before the question had been posed. But the prevailing impression left by the strike's failure was not only that the unions could not, by the use of industrial power, act as an agency of change, but also that they could not even protect their members when their wages and conditions came under sustained attack in a period of economic crisis. The unions' decline in membership continued.

As well as facing difficulties from unemployment and employer resistance, union recruitment suffered from, on the one hand, the

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1. Who's Who in Bristol.

apathy and disillusionment arising out of the defeat, and on the other hand, from a disenchantment with the unions by more conservative sections of newly recruited members who saw the general strike as a misuse of union power. Thus the T.G.W.U.'s clerical section lost members in the Corporation offices,[1] whilst that union's membership also slumped catastrophically in the factories of Fry's and Wills where, although members were not actually called out during the strike, conflicts tended to be more muted and therefore productive of less militant attitudes.[2]

The decline can be traced by reference to the membership figures of the unions quoted in an earlier chapter. From the table below it can be seen that the membership of three of the four selected unions continued to decline after the general strike, although in the case of the A.S.W. the trend was in the opposite direction until 1931. In the early 1930s, with unemployment at its peak, union membership suffered even more severely, but by the middle 1930s there was a general revival, which continued until the end of our period.

Table VI Membership of selected unions in Bristol, 1925-1939

	1925	1927	1929	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
A.E.U.[3]	2184	1966	1949	1861	1592	1985	3257	5963
A.S.W.[4]	1870	1922	1913	1986	1743	1731	1994	2301
N.A.F.T.A.[5]	480	476	488	419	403	419	441	400
N.U.B.S.O.[6]	2918	2612	2515	2582	2254	2093	2061	1984

1. The Record, May 1937.
2. T.G.W.U., Annual Reports, 1922-1928, passim.
3. A.E.U., Monthly Reports, passim; Figures taken from the December issue of each journal.
4. A.S.W., Monthly Reports, passim.
5. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Reports, passim.
6. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Reports, passim.

Of the four selected unions, the A.E.U. conformed most closely to the national pattern of growth and decline. It had lost members heavily in the post-war slump, and continued to decline slowly throughout the 1920s, despite the organising efforts of the union officials. It slumped again in the early 1930s, but from about 1934 onwards the union's fortunes changed, and by 1939 it was second only to the T.G.W.U. in the Bristol area. The major factor in this recovery was the expansion of the local aircraft industry during the pre-war rearmament boom, and the union's ability to take full advantage of the recruitment opportunities presented to it. Many of the enlarged labour force were engineering workers from other parts of the country, for the aircraft industry was able to attract workers from depressed areas such as the North-West, and even further afield.[1] Many of them would have already been members of the A.E.U., although the union faced a problem of keeping in touch with members who came into the area. Organising meetings at the factory gates were held regularly from 1935, and these, together with the efforts of the emerging shop steward system which the officials fostered, enabled the A.E.U. to increase its membership enormously. In March 1936 100% membership was claimed at the Parnall factory in Yate, although the Bristol factories presented more of a problem.[2] To facilitate organisation there, new branches were created in the Filton and Patchway areas in the late 1930s.

By contrast, the woodworkers' unions failed to take advantage of the recruitment opportunities in the aircraft industry. The manufacture of airframes had been mainly a woodworking trade until the Second World War, and the relatively sheltered nature of the aircraft industry may

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1. H. Shannon, op.cit., p.32.
2. A.E.U., Monthly Report, March 1936.

help to explain why the A.S.W., contrary to the general trend, continued to grow in the 1920s. But neither the A.S.W., nor N.A.F.T.A., benefitted markedly from the expansion of the industry in the late 1930s. Partly this was due to the development of metal airframes; the Bristol Blenheim was the first aircraft to be built with an all-metal airframe.[1] But there were still large numbers of woodworkers required in the industry and some trades, such as polishers, were claimed to be within the recruiting sphere of the woodworkers.[2] Where the job was previously performed by woodworkers, it was deemed to be within the province of the woodworkers' unions.

The major factor appears to have been the extension in aircraft factories of systems of wages payment by results, to which both A.S.W. and N.A.F.T.A. were implacably opposed. After the war pieceworking agreements had been reached between B.A.C. and several unions, including the A.E.U.[3] But the A.S.W. and N.A.F.T.A. refused to accept piecework agreements, banned their members from working in shops which operated them, and expelled members who agreed to them. B.A.C. was on the blacklist of the A.S.W. throughout the inter-war period, and Parnalls was added in 1939.[4] This policy raised protests among union members in Bristol, but the union General Council reaffirmed its policy in 1939.[5]

In the boot and shoe industry, the general decline in the trade locally affected the union's membership, and there was no recovery in the later 1930s. The backwardness of the industry in Bristol and Kingswood left several of the small local firms especially vulnerable to the hostile

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1. Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Monthly Journal, May 1937.
2. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Report, May 1936.
3. Engineering & Allied Employers (West of England) Association, Agreements, 1920/21.
4. A.S.W., Monthly Reports; N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Reports; passim.
5. A.S.W., G.C. Mins., June 1939; See also T. J. Connelly, The Woodworkers, (London 1960).

conditions of the inter-war period. Depression in the mining industry reduced the demand for the Kingswood heavy boot, and many firms producing this type of footwear went out of business. Other firms which managed to survive, did so by a process of rationalisation; the change towards the lighter fashion footwear was accompanied by a switch to machine production. Derham Brothers of Staple Hill were one of the local leaders in this field.[1] This trade enjoyed a boom whilst the rest of the industry was depressed. Yet whilst this meant better job security for some workers, the industry became less labour-intensive, and thus employment opportunities generally were reduced. In the period 1924-1935 the industry nationally cut back its labour force by 19%, whereas in the same period output per man-hour was increased by 28%.[2] The union's field of recruitment declined, and N.U.B.S.O. itself was forced to rationalise its activity in Bristol. In 1933 the three local branches were amalgamated into one.[3] By 1939 the total membership of N.U.B.S.O. in the whole Bristol district, which by now included some of the Somerset villages, Gloucester, Cheltenham and the new centre of Brynmawr in South Wales, was only slightly larger than it had been in 1910. Moreover, with the change towards machine production, job opportunities for men declined and those for women increased. During the period 1934-1939, when total membership was declining, the number of women members was increasing. Of the 1984 members of the union in 1939, 544 were women; in 1934, there had been 403 women in a total of 2138 members.[4]

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1. Bristol Chamber of Commerce, Annual Reports, 1933.
2. A. Fox, op.cit., p.419.
3. N.U.B.S.O., Bristol and Kingswood branches, Mins., October 1933 - February 1934.
4. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Reports, passim.

Just as the general unions had benefitted most from the boom in union membership during the war and post-war boom, so they suffered most from the subsequent decline. The Workers' Union dwindled almost to obscurity in Bristol during the 1920s before, in 1929, the union amalgamated with the T.G.W.U.[1] Amalgamation was one possible response to the problems of all unions, but could not prevent them being pushed back into a minority position among the workforce as a whole. In some areas, notably the tramways, unionism was eradicated altogether, whilst elsewhere it survived fairly well. But the unions were not pushed back to their pre-1910 position, for they retained a foothold in most of the industries into which they had expanded in the more favourable years, and these provided valuable springboards for renewed expansion when employment conditions improved. Meanwhile, in the new spelter industry at Avonmouth union membership continued to grow even in the worst period of the depression, and by 1934 the T.G.W.U. claimed 100% membership there.[2]

In the middle 1930s the general unions, too, began to revive. Organisation returned to the buses and trams, with the blessing of the management.[3] The T.G.W.U. Clerical section revived, and by 1937 was said to stand at over 1000 members.[4] Trade unionism was also brought to the clerks on the tramways and in the aircraft industry by the T.G.W.U. as well as by the clerical unions, whilst the T.G.W.U. joined hands with the A.E.U. in enrolling manual workers in the aircraft industry.[5] This renewed phase of expansion was distinguished from the earlier in that it

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1. R. Hyman, op.cit., p.163.
2. The Record, July 1934.
3. ibid., October 1935, January-February 1936, June 1937.
4. ibid., May 1937.
5. A.E.U., Monthly Reports, passim; The Record, September 1936.

was not related in any way to the needs of the original core groups of the union. The dockers had by this time secured their own trade union position through their own strength and recognition from the employers. In the late 1930s the expansion was related much more to the institutional needs of a union such as the T.G.W.U. to expand into as many areas as possible, and the needs of non-unionised workers to recoup some of the losses of the depression years. Yet the fact that so many joined the T.G.W.U. was of importance for the Labour movement, for the general unions, though not competing with each other, were in competition with sectional unions such as the Tobacco Workers, the National Union of Clerks, and N.U.D.A.W. The reason why clerical workers, for example, joined the T.G.W.U. was often simply that the manual workers in the same industry were already members of that union. Yet at Fry's, where the production workers were represented by the T.G.W.U., clerical workers were represented by the N.U.C., thus illustrating that there was no automatic right for a union to represent all grades of workers in one industry.[1]

Part of the explanation may lie in a growing class consciousness, which was expressed through membership of an all-grades union. This is, however, a problematic proposition, because the structure of the T.G.W.U., with separate trade groups, allowed sectionalism to flourish within the all-grades union. This was especially true in the case of the clerks, whose separate trade group was eventually, in recognition of their sectional and status-conscious attitudes, given the name of the National Association of Clerical and Supervisory Staffs.[2] Yet the T.G.W.U. had other features which cut across this sectionalism. In its internal life as a union there was an attempt to keep alive a more

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1. J. S. Fry and Son Ltd., Records relating to negotiations with trade unions.
2. The Record, May 1939.

generalised solidarity. An Educational and Social Council was established by the T.G.W.U. in Bristol in 1920 to organise classes, lectures, social events and sporting activities. One of its activities was the Annual Trade Union Festival held every summer in the Zoological Gardens, which was described by the Record as: 'A magnificent effort to keep members in contact, and it develops friendship amongst all those who serve the union; it is one of the greatest gatherings held by any union in the country.'[1] These activities were an expression of the fact that trade unionism, for at least a part of its membership, was not purely an economic, instrumental activity but also, to a greater or lesser extent, still involved an identification with the class-conscious attitudes of the Labour movement. Although the two motives were contradictory, they could be and were held by many people at one and the same time, and thus could find expression through one and the same union. The Trades Council was another expression of the class character of trades unionism, and it is significant that during the 1920s the number of white-collar unions affiliated to it increased.[2] Thus although there was no activity which demonstrated the existence of active feelings of solidarity, we should not automatically conclude that these feelings were dead, even in the apparently barren years.

The educational and social activities of the T.G.W.U., however, were essentially secondary to the main thrust of union policy. The predominant tendency within the unions, in the years after the general strike, was towards greater sectionalism, and increasing accommodation between union officials and employers. The attempt to keep alive the traditions of class solidarity might, in theory, have cut across these

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1. D.R., November 1920. The Record, February 1938.
2. Bristol Trades & Labour Council (Industrial section), Annual Reports, 1928, 1934, 1936, 1937, 1938.

trends. That it did not do so was due mainly to the fact that the tradition survived in a sentimentalised form, with very little basis in the current activity of the membership. Spontaneous solidarity was no longer an active force within the T.G.W.U., or the unions in general. In its sentimentalised and institutionalised form, the tradition of comradeship represented no threat to the policies of the union officials, which we shall examine in the next section.

III) Collective Bargaining

The defeat of the General Strike left the General Council of the T.U.C. without a coherent strategy with which to face the problems trades unionists were encountering. Several union leaders raised the cry of "Never Again" in relation to the general strike, and indeed there was no possibility of a repeat of the exercise.[1] If the policy of confrontation had failed, then the General Council was left with no other strategy but that of collaboration, and in the Council, in the years after 1926, the forces that stood for such a policy prevailed. The Council entered into discussions with a group of employers, in a series of talks known as the Mond-Turner discussions, which were based on the premise that employers and workers had a common interest in the prosperity of industry. Bevin was among the most forthright proponents of this approach. He had come to believe that many of the changes that were taking place in the capitalist organisation of industry, such as the rationalisation of processes and the trend towards monopoly, should not be resisted by the unions. He preferred to deal with a few large employers rather than many small ones, and was not deterred by the fact

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1. T.U.C./G.C. Report of National Strike, Special Conference, (1927).

that rationalisation, although it might tend towards greater security of employment for some workers, almost inevitably led to the redundancy of many others.[1]

Bevin's aims, and those of his colleagues, were that employers and union officials should arrive at an understanding of the needs of industry, and should jointly present to the Government proposals on economic policy. He took as his starting point the basic proposition on which the wartime B.A.I.R. discussions were founded, recognition by the employers of the trades unions, and one of the first declarations to come out of the talks was a statement by the employers that it was desirable for all workers to belong to a union. But, unlike the B.A.I.R. discussions, Bevin's aims did not stop at recognition. He seems genuinely to have come round to the view that, whilst unions and employers represented separate interests, which must necessarily have independent organisational expressions, these interests were not mutually exclusive, and could best be pursued through co-operation rather than conflict. This had not been true of his thinking at the time of the B.A.I.R. discussions. Yet he had not accepted, even now, the ideology of industrial peace and was completely opposed to the supine company unionism of Havelock Wilson. Nevertheless, in his conduct of union affairs, the new thinking could not fail to exercise an influence, even after the failure of the talks, and this can be traced in the union's relationships with employers in Bristol.

It is important not to place too much emphasis on the Mond-Turner talks, at least as they affected the policies of the T.G.W.U. As we have seen, long before 1926 the Dockers' Union, and its successor, the T.G.W.U., had taken on a firm operational commitment to the avoidance of industrial

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1. A. Bullock, op.cit., p.396.

conflict. The Mond-Turner talks signify a change in that this commitment was beginning to operate at an ideological level. But in practical terms the changes were not immediate, nor were they great. Very few of the Conciliation Boards and procedure agreements that were in use in Bristol in the 1930s had been formed after 1926. The absence of strike activity was not due merely to the policies of the union leadership, but also to the crushing of the spirit of militancy in the defeat of 1926. But something of a change can be seen in the dealings of the T.G.W.U. with some local employers. The pattern of industrial relations on the docks had been established before 1926, and survived the general strike; the only difference after 1926 was that the rank and file were less prone to take unofficial strike action.

We have seen above that organisation returned to the tramways and buses in 1935 and 1936. By the beginning of 1936 the union officials felt strong enough to approach the management with proposals for a local agreement.[1] But by 1936 circumstances had changed since the last time union officials had negotiated with the company. Since 1931 the company had been owned by the Western National Omnibus Company, which was owned in turn by the Great Western Railway and the National Omnibus and Transport Company, a subsidiary of the Tilling group.[2] There is little doubt that union negotiators, in the same spirit in which Bevin entered into the Mond-Turner talks, found it easier to deal with the local management of a large combine than they had with the owners of a family firm. In July 1936 an agreement was reached which established machinery for the avoidance of disputes, as a preliminary to a more comprehensive agreement covering wages and conditions of employment.[3]

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1. The Record, February 1936. B.E.P., 10 January 1936.
2. Labour Research Department, 'Who's Who in Bristol', (1935).
3. B.E.P., 18 July 1936.

In contrast to the earlier period, relations between the T.G.W.U. and the company in the late 1930s were relatively cordial.

There were other large combines in Bristol with which the T.G.W.U. negotiated, particularly the Wills branch of Imperial Tobacco and the Fry's branch of Cadburys. Organisation had been introduced into both these companies during the war, and had flourished. In Wills, membership tailed off considerably during the 1920s and the union, though negotiating with the company, appears not to have been able to develop a secure and stable relationship locally.[1] Because wage costs were such a small proportion of total production costs, wages and benefits at Wills tended to be comparatively high, and there were no wage reductions during the inter-war period. Nor were there redundancies, for when work was scarce, the company implemented a work-sharing and short-time scheme. Conflicts were consequently muted.

At the Fry's Chocolate factory there had been some brief contact with the unions in 1889 when the Gasworkers' organised some of the production workers there.[2] It did not return until 1917, and initially encountered some resistance from the directors of the family firm, who were reluctant to grant recognition.[3] But no recognition strike resulted because in the conditions of wartime, the union was able to appeal to the Ministry of Labour to act as conciliator. In 1918 the company was taken over by Cadburys, although there was still considerable local autonomy allowed to the Fry's branch.[4] In that same year wage bargaining was centralised with the formation of an Interim Industrial Reconstruction Committee, (I.I.R.C.) on the lines of the Whitley recommendations.

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1. D.R.; The Record, T.G.W.U. Annual Reports, passim.
2. W.D.P., 30 September; 21 October, 1889.
3. D.R., June 1918.
4. I. A. Williams, The Firm of Cadbury, (1931), p.84.

But despite conceding recognition, the Fry's management was uneasy about the intervention of outside union officials in factory affairs. Part of their paternalistic attitude was the value which they set on their own ability to have direct contact with the workforce. Thus in 1919, when local negotiations were held over the interpretation of I.L.R.C. agreements on hours, there were three members of the Fry family present, and R. J. Fry announced that it was the strong wish of the management that a Works Council, with equal representation of workers and management, be set up.[1] A Council on these lines had been established at the Cadbury factory at Bournville, and was taken as a model by Fry's. But the Dockers' Union representatives consistently resisted the idea, regarding it as an attempt to circumvent the union. A report of a meeting held in 1927 between union representatives from Bournville and Bristol factories, summed up the Bristol attitude thus: 'With a Works Council at work, trade union functions were practically nil, and our friends at Bournville, with their organiser, admitted that their trade union officials were only passengers.'[2]

In order to prevent this happening in Bristol, the union attempted to establish itself as the sole channel of communication between management and workers. The possibilities of achieving this were perhaps increased by the taking over of control of Fry's by Bournville men, such as Major Cadbury and A. E. Cater. Cadbury, indeed, pressed the union into co-operating 'in providing channels with the sole object of preventing misunderstanding on domestic matters which directly affect the firm and its employees.'[3] The Unions' ability to perform this role depended on the strength of its organisation. In 1922 the Fry's branches

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1. Notes on joint meetings of Directors and Management with the Works Committee, November 1919, (Papers lent by Mr. D. Brown).
2. Report on a meeting with Bournville trade union representatives to discuss respective situations, 1927, (D. Brown papers).
3. Major Cadbury to Butson, (T.G.W.U., Confectionery Section Officer), 6 October 1924, (Papers in possession of D. Brown).

were among the largest in the region, with 2000 women and 1572 men. The men's branch held on to the majority of its members during the 1920s, but the women's declined catastrophically, so that by 1928 there were only 100 members left.[1] In their correspondence with management, union officials were continually asking management for assistance in persuading workers to join, but were refused.

The company were mainly concerned with establishing channels of communication. Discussions were therefore started which aimed, in Bevin's words, at 'a clear understanding and fixing of responsibility,'[2] and the result was a procedure agreement signed by Bevin and Cadbury in 1925.[3] This agreement, regarded by union officials as a model, provided 'an official channel (for) the interchange of views on subjects affecting members of the union.' It laid down a clear, but lengthy procedure for the hearing and settlement of shop-floor grievances, with four distinct stages, laying down which union representative should negotiate with which level of management. There was a hierarchy of stages which progressively removed the issue in dispute from the shop floor to higher levels, until the final responsibility rested with Bevin and Cadbury. Moreover, the time scale was laid down to ensure relatively speedy decisions.

Having secured an agreement, union officials adopted an even firmer commitment to it than management. For it was this agreement which enabled them to provide a continuing service to their members and thus develop a stable relationship with them. In other words it granted full recognition to the union, which was protected at all costs by the union officials.

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1. T.G.W.U., Annual Reports, passim.
2. E. Bevin to Major Cadbury, 8 January 1925.
3. Agreement between T.G.W.U. and J. S. Fry & Son Ltd., March 1925.

In 1926 the T.G.W.U.'s failure to call out its members in the general strike, in contrast to the action of the N.F.B.T.O. and the E.T.U. in calling out maintenance men, was motivated, at least in part, by the union's desire not to endanger the agreement.[1] In 1932, when the company wished to increase working hours to improve its competitive position, it was able to use the union's dependence on this agreement very effectively as a lever in the negotiations. When the proposal was first put to Bevin in 1931 he was reported to be 'absolutely adamant against this. He stated ... that he would almost sooner agree to anything else rather than break the principle of the 44 hour week. It was the keystone in the Labour Party campaign against unemployment.'[2] Indeed, Bevin himself wrote a pamphlet in 1933 entitled My Plan for Two Million Workless in which his major proposal was a reduction in working hours to 40 a week.[3] He thus regarded the matter as one of some considerable importance.

The firm issued notices that after 18th July 1932 the new working hours would be operative, and prepared to face resistance from the union.[4] A mass meeting in July pledged support for a policy of resistance.[5] But negotiations continued, and on the eve of the threatened strike, the dispute was settled on the company's terms. The union, in the management's assessment, was ill-prepared for a strike. Membership was at a low ebb, and the expected support from Bournville did not materialise. But the reason for the union's climb down was mainly that the company threatened to withdraw from the I.I.R.C. and go on to Trade Board rates and conditions.[6]

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1. The Company took a very hard line in correspondence with the A.E.U. and E.T.U., 12 May 1926, threatening to sack members who had joined the strike.
2. Cadbury to Bowron, Memo, 11 September 1931.
3. A. Bullock, op.cit., pp.516-8.
4. B.E.P., 6 July 1932.
5. W.D.P., 15 July 1932.
6. The threat was made in a letter from Cadbury to Bevin, 24 May 1932, and repeated in a letter to Ministry of Labour, 12 July 1932. An agreement was reached on 14 July, in which Bevin agreed not to oppose the introduction of a 46½ hour week, and in return, he hoped this would mean Fry's need not leave the I.I.R.C.

Bevin was clearly impressed by this threat and was probably swayed by it. The maintenance of the negotiating machinery, it seemed, had become a more important objective than the ends which that machinery was supposed to serve.

Through the local agreement the union officials had attempted to interpose themselves between the company and its members. But they were only to be brought into discussions on a particular issue after the internal procedures had been exhausted. This was the essence of their mediatory role, for the procedure was based on the assumption that officials who were further removed from the actual situation would be more able to reach compromise settlements. Their ability to mediate depended on the existence of a clearly laid-out procedure which established their position within it, and recognised them as being separate from their members. For the company to enter into such an arrangement, there had to be tangible advantages, since the traditional paternalistic distrust of outsiders still persisted. As late as 1937 there was evidence of management suspicion of officials. An internal memorandum referring to a meeting with the union officials, at which two female departmental representatives were present, reported that: 'The interview was carried out in as friendly and informal a manner as possible, in order that the girl who represented the catering department may be impressed with the friendly manner in which those responsible for wages etc., can be approached, so that she may be inclined to think that a lot of the difficulties which may occur from time to time could be settled without having to resort to outside union officials.'[1]

Yet the management also increasingly enlisted the support of union officials to mediate on conflicts within the factory. They were

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1. J. S. Fry, Notes on meetings with T.G.W.U. officials, 19 November 1937.

genuinely surprised by the opposition that the increase in hours had aroused. The Labour manager reported this to Major Cadbury, and added that the union officials 'were always anxious to co-operate with us, even if they disagreed, but the attitude of a number of representatives inside our works has been in the opposite direction.' But surprisingly he recommended that '... consideration be given to the advisability of cancelling the local agreement, and instead of attempting to work through the union, to set up an alternative means by which the Directors, Staff and employees can co-operate with each other.'[1]

The recommendation was not taken up. Indeed, over the next few years officials became more and more involved in the affairs of the factory. Partly this was at the behest of the management who were concerned that, although 'official relations between the firm and the union was very friendly, ... as matters stand the only contact between the firm and the union is on questions of grievances. There is no machinery for consideration of the problems which lie ahead of us, and which equally concern the firm and its employees.'[2] They were also concerned at the deterioration of internal relations after 1932, and attempted to enlist the support of the officials against a 'minority inside the works who are doing all they can to create a gulf between employees in the works belonging to the union, and the firm.'[3] This minority, it was stressed, were unofficial and Cadbury was advised, in an interview he was to have with Bevin, to 'point out ... that you think the time has arrived for Bevin to clearly indicate to his union that he is desirous of improving relations between the employees and the firm, and will not countenance any move, even if it is an unofficial one, likely to have the contrary effect.'[4]

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1. Bowron to Cadbury, 13 July 1932, Synopsis of correspondenc with T.G.W.U.
2. Bowron to Cadbury, September 1933, Suggestions for forthcoming interview with Bevin.
3. ibid.
4. ibid.

Not only did the firm expect the union's support in areas such as this, but also in the area of general discipline. Just as on the docks so too at Fry's, T.G.W.U. officials involved themselves in the prevention of pilfering. Thus in November 1932, the District Secretary Donovan told the Works Committee that management were concerned about an increase in pilfering, and felt that '... if the employees were informed through the union that the firm knew this was going on, and that the union discountenanced anything of this nature, it would have the desired effect.'[1] The internal memoranda of the management indicate that the officials were always willing to help. Bevin's close personal involvement was obviously important here, for lower officials would need to stand well in his eyes. There was thus close attention paid to the affairs of the Fry's branches by the Regional Office. The District Secretary was a frequent visitor to the Works Committee which linked the two branches, and one or two local officials were always present.[2] And when, in 1936, a special committee of four shop floor representatives and two officials was set up to meet management to discuss questions arising out of the changeover from the Bristol to the Keynsham factory, Donovan considered the committee so important that he said he was 'going to try and attend every meeting, even if it meant putting off or deputising other business.'[3]

The trend towards low-level joint consultation was carried further in 1936 when the local agreement was revised, and an Addendum Committee set up for the 'purpose of considering matters affecting the employees generally, as distinct from Departmental problems already covered by the main Local Agreement.'[4] It was through this committee that the union began to concern itself in the area of job regulation, and thus to

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1. T.G.W.U., Frys Works Committee, Mins., November 1932.
2. T.G.W.U., Frys Works Committee, Mins., passim.
3. ibid. August 1936.
4. Addendum to Local Agreement between T. & G.W.U. and J. S. Fry & Sons Ltd., 3 March 1936.

develop an even closer relationship with the firm. This trend did not pass entirely unnoticed by the union membership. The Works' Committee minutes for 1930 record the views of 'a section of the Works' Committee', who criticised the officials for having shown a 'decided propensity for listening to the firm's story and then forming a judgement without listening to the other side. It was like paying a solicitor to defend a case, and then upon appearing finding that the solicitor was aligning himself with the judge.'[1] But, criticism notwithstanding, the officials encountered hardly any opposition to their policy and indeed the branch, as we shall see, formed an important part of Donovan's power base within the local Labour movement for his conservative policies.

The boot and shoe trade in Bristol and Kingswood witnessed a return to the chaotic conditions of pre-war during the 1920s and 1930s. There were some attempts by N.U.B.S.O. to discipline members who were forced to accept work at less than the union rate, but the setbacks suffered by the union induced apathy and indifference among the membership. Unlike other industries, which before 1926 were the scene of massive confrontations, in the boot and shoe trade there was no resistance to wage cutting. Even in the later 1930s, when trade was beginning to revive, the gains made by the union were modest. Part of the reason for this was simply timidity on the part of the national negotiators of N.U.B.S.O., and their attachment to the machinery of negotiation and conciliation, which 'may have led them to lean over backwards to see the employers' point of view.'[2]

In some cases the union was prepared to adopt an aggressive stance, particularly towards non-federated employers, but the tendency towards

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1. T.G.W.U., Frys Works Committee, Mins., January 1930.
2. A. Fox, op.cit., p.507.

pursuing union objectives in alliance with the Manufacturers Federation was increased. In Bristol, those firms which formed the core of the Federation tended to be the better-equipped, more efficient, larger units. Those who left the Federation in order no longer to be bound by collective agreements tended to be smaller scale and technically backward. One of the local manufacturers claimed in 1935 that only eight local firms were Federated, but that they accounted for a large proportion of the local output.[1] It was in alliance with these firms that the union officials began to try and impose some uniformity on local wage rates and conditions, and bring them up to the standard set by National Agreements. First steps towards this were taken in 1929 when a conference was held between the leading officials of N.U.B.S.O. and the local federated firms, which agreed to take action on a co-operative basis to enforce the terms of the National Agreement.[2] The conference agreed that open conflict was 'not the way to maintain the standard of living of the operatives.'

During the next five years a vigorous organising effort was conducted by the union and the Federation. The Monthly Report of April 1933 spoke of 'help from the Manufacturers' Federation and the Board in persuading firms to conform to Federation conditions.'[3] Progress was better when trade improved, and it was not until 1935 that real advances were made. In October 1935 it was reported that the 'influence of the union is stronger today in Kingswood than it has been for a long time past.'[4] Both the 1936 and 1938 National Agreements were applied throughout the district, by federated and non-federated firms alike.[5] By 1939, when large army contracts were again being placed in the district

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1. M.D.P., 24 January 1935.
2. M.D.P., 21 February 1929.
3. N.U.B.S.O., Monthly Report, April 1933.
4. ibid., October 1935.
5. ibid., passim.

much of the chaos in collective bargaining had been sorted out, and the close relationship between the union and the Federation had been consolidated.

For the miners, the years following the general strike were described by their agent as the worst in their history, with extensive unemployment and short-time working completing their demoralisation.[1] Some relief was afforded them by the second Labour Government's 1930 Mines Act, which limited the working day to a seven and a half hour shift.[2] But immediately the B.M.A. was thrown into a struggle with the local owners who would only agree to implement the Act on condition that wages were further reduced also. Negotiations on this point finally broke down in March 1931 and a strike resulted. This was the only major struggle in Bristol during the entire period from 1926 to 1939, and was eloquent testimony to the continuing determination of the miners not to allow wages and conditions to be reduced still further. The strike lasted seven weeks, and was finally settled after the intervention of A. Cook, who persuaded the owners to moderate their demands from a 14% cut to a 5½% cut, and persuaded the miners, against considerable opposition, to accept these terms.[3]

The early 1930s were a period of rapid decline in the Bristol coalfield. In December 1932 it was announced that the Speedwell pit was to close, thus placing the whole future of the coalfield in jeopardy.[4] The Lord Mayor launched a public appeal fund to find money for the opening of new coal seams, and thereby succeeded in delaying the closure.[5] But in 1936 Speedwell pit finally closed, and because of the danger of flooding

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1. W.D.P., 13 February 1928.
2. C. L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars; (1955), pp.364-5.
3. W.D.P., 27 November 1930 - 20 April 1931.
   B.T.M., ibid.
4. B.E.P., 20 December 1932.
5. B.E.P., 25 January 1933.

at Parkfield, this pit also had to close.[1] This left only the Coalpit Heath mine, employing some 300 miners, still working. Yet despite the decline of the industry, the union did not relax its efforts, and managed to retain organisation among the surviving miners. In 1932 a 98% organisation was claimed, and, in spite of closures,[2] from the mid-1930s, the union renewed its efforts to secure wage increases and a definite wages agreement to replace the chaos of day-to-day contract working that had been imposed after the general strike.[3] The B.M.A.'s achievements on wages and conditions, in the face of enormous difficulties, were a stark contrast with the poor gains made by N.U.B.S.O., which locally faced much the same problems.

IV) Workshop Organisation

The combined effects of unemployment, declining union membership, and employer reaction to the general strike, dealt a shattering blow to workshop organisation. As we have seen, the number of shop stewards operating in industrial establishments had already declined before 1926: the situation after the General Strike was even more inimical to their survival. But amongst the better organised craft trades, especially the maintenance engineers and electricians on the docks and in the larger factories, a shop steward system remained intact even in the worst years of industrial depression. The E.T.U., for example, had shop stewards operating in the Avonmouth docks,[4] as did the A.E.U.[5] The latter union also maintained its shop floor organisation amongst maintenance engineers at Fry's,[6] and at I.C.I.,[7] and extended the system to cover its members

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1. W.D.P., 3 April 1936; 22 June 1936.
2. W.D.P., 15 February 1932.
3. W.D.P., 11 December 1936 - 4 January 1937; B.E.P., ibid.
4. E.T.U., Bristol No. 1 branch, Mins., December 1928.
5. A.E.U., Monthly Journal, June 1927.
6. A.E.U., Monthly Journal, Dec. 1924.
7. ibid., January 1930.

at the National Smelting Co.'s Works at Avonmouth in 1930.[1] Some A.E.U. shop stewards were also operating at the B.A.C. works throughout the period, although shop floor organisation there, in general, tended to be weak.[2]

After the war shop stewards were given official recognition as negotiators in their own right by both unions and employers, and the A.E.U. stewards who were operating in Bristol maintained a close relationship with their fulltime officials. Indeed, it was the Organising District Delegate in Bristol, E. Porter, who was the main propagandist locally for the virtues of shop-floor organisation. Occasional meetings of local shop stewards with the O.D.D. concerned themselves with the state of union organisation in the district. In his reports in the union journal, Porter continually emphasised the importance of the shop steward's role in maintaining and extending trade union organisation. He described them as the 'pivots of progress'.[3] But he did not merely stress their role as organisers. In shops where payment-by-results wage systems were in operation he stressed, the lack of good workshop organisation led to a situation where workers were 'receiving balances far below the provisions of the agreement providing for payments-by-results systems.'[4]

As with the T.G.W.U., so with the A.E.U., the situation at Fry's was regarded with great satisfaction by union officials. The A.E.U. succeeded in maintaining 100% organisation among maintenance engineers there, and in building up a shop steward system which was held up as a 'shining example' to the rest of the membership locally. In 1925, a shop stewards' committee was established among engineers at Fry's which, in Porter's words, was 'designed to meet modern industrial demands.'

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1. A.E.U., Monthly Journal, September 1930.
2. ibid., passim.
3. ibid., November 1924.
4. ibid., July 1934.

The Union's District Committee took a close interest in the affairs of the committee, and its monthly meetings, which continued throughout the inter-war period, were attended by the O.D.D.[1]

By contrast, the situation in the aircraft industry during much of this period gave cause for concern. On a number of occasions there were complaints that the piecework prices obtained by A.E.U. members at B.A.C. were not yielding the full 33⅓% bonus laid down in agreements.[2] This failure was almost entirely due to the weakness of shop floor organisation at the Filton and Patchway works. In the mid-1930s, however, the rearmament boom changed the whole situation within the industry, and at the same time as union membership grew, many more shop stewards were appointed to improve shop-floor organisation. In this phase much more of the initiative for improving organisation came from the shop floor, but in Bristol the officials too played a leading role, as marked out for them by previous trends. The local officials of eleven unions concerned in the industry, including the A.E.U. and N.A.F.T.A., established early in 1936 a local Aircraft Council.[3] Unofficial bodies such as the National Aircraft Shop Stewards' Movement which developed in other centres of the industry at this time appear to have had very little influence in Bristol. The officials, in alliance with the shop stewards, remained very firmly in control of union affairs at the aircraft factories, as elsewhere in Bristol.

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1. A.E.U., Monthly Journal, Feb. 1925.
2. ibid., April 1930.
3. N.A.F.T.A., Monthly Report, February 1936.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Labour Movement, 1926-1935

I) The aftermath of the General Strike

The defeat of the General Strike finally put an end to the notion that the trades unions could provide an alternative channel for the assertion of the working class's political presence. The Bristol I.L.P. suggested that the B.L.P. should hold a conference to discuss the lessons from the defeat, but this was put off until after the T.U.C. special conference, and then was not held at all.[1] There was thus no systematic attempt to understand and explain the significance of this shattering blow to the movement as a whole. But Labour Party members drew the almost automatic conclusion that they should put in even greater efforts to secure the return of a Labour government, and the electoral effort again held the centre of the stage.

In Municipal elections, the Labour Party stepped up its challenge to the domination by the Citizen party, and began to contest every seat. In many wards the Labour Party had no chance of winning, but they were contested in order to tie down the organisation of their opponents. The Labour Party's ability to contest these difficult wards, many of which were in Bristol West, shows the strides that had been made by the West C.L.P. after it had established a stable party structure in 1926.[2] Between 1926 and 1929 Labour gained 14 seats on the council, thereby increasing the Labour group to 32 councillors and six aldermen. These gains, for the most part, followed the established pattern. The Labour Party's hold over the working class wards was strengthened and consolidated,

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1. Bristol North C.L.P., G.C. Mins., May-June 1926.
2. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., September 1926. A G.C. was established for the first time.

with the addition of St. Paul's to those where it had a monopoly of seats, and gains also in St. Augustine and Redcliff.[1] In 1929, also, Labour won its first seats in the predominantly white-collar and middle class residential areas of Southville and Somerset.[2] These gains placed the party in a position where, for the first time, it could seriously consider the possibility of gaining a majority on the Council.

But further progress would be much more difficult. The B.L.W. initiated a debate on the problems facing Labour at elections after the 1927 poll. Some stressed the need for more efficient electoral machinery, with the B.L.P. intervening much more in the running of the election campaigns, as well as the need for a 'scientific' canvass of the wards.[3] But as the tributes of Labour's opponents testify, the party's electoral machine was in good shape; the main difficulties lay elsewhere. Firstly the control by the Citizen party over elections to the aldermanic bench was used in a blatantly discriminatory fashion. Before 1914, aldermen had been elected, by an arrangement between the Conservative and Liberal parties, on the basis of one to every three councillors. On this basis, Labour would have qualified for ten or eleven aldermen in 1929. But no new Labour aldermen were elected between 1920 and 1929, since the Coalition parties agreed to change the basis on which seats were allocated to one of seniority.[4] This discriminated against the Labour Party, most of whose councillors were comparative newcomers.

The second factor was the inequitable distribution of seats, which has already been mentioned. In parts of the growing suburban areas,

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1. Labour gained seats in Redcliff in 1928 and 1929, and in St. Augustine in 1929.
2. Both in 1929. The candidate in Southville, an area which housed many Wills' workers, was W. Dancy, T.G.W.U. Tobacco section officer.
3. Bristol Labour Weekly, 12 November 1927.
4. The change was brought in some time in the early 1920s, as the Labour Party began to gain more council seats. In 1926, after Ald. W. Whitefield died, the Citizen majority replaced him with one of their own number, on the basis of seniority. (B.L.W., 10 Sept. 1927).

which were under-represented, there were new council housing estates in the course of construction, and the Labour Party could expect to win seats there if ward boundaries were changed. But these were also areas of extensive private housing, and the Labour Party's inability to appeal to white-collar and middle class voters was a problem which was beginning to exercise the minds of some of its members. The general strike undoubtedly increased the alienation of large sections of these people from the Labour movement. Burgess, an official of the T.G.W.U.'s clerical section, drew attention to the Labour Party's weakness in this area. 'While we have consolidated our position in the purely working class wards,' he wrote, '... we shall have to make up our minds that before we can make further solid progress we shall have to break through in the partly working class, partly residential (some would prefer 'bourgeois') wards, as for instance, Horfield, Somerset, Stapleton and Southville.'[1]

Burgess's proposals for achieving this were mainly instrumental rather than political; he advocated a more efficient electoral machine, and the necessity of selecting 'the right candidate for the right ward.' The typical candidate in Horfield ward for example before 1926, had been a trade union official. But during the period 1926-1930 the number of officials in the panel of candidates declined markedly. The number of manual workers remained low, but the number from white-collar and professional occupations, or those who owned their own businesses, increased sharply. From an average of five or six before 1926, this group increased to an average of eleven or twelve afterwards.[2] Most were candidates in the predominantly middle class wards.

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1. B.L.W., 12 November 1927.
2. A typical group of candidates, in 1928, were described as, a gentleman, a clerk, a teacher, a photographer, two insurance agents, and two civil servants. (W.D.P., 2 November 1929).

In parliamentary elections, too, the problem of the middle class voter and the need to expunge the memory of the General Strike were uppermost in Labour thinking. In January 1928 a by-election was fought in Bristol West, and was contested for Labour by Lady Clare Annesley, whose main aim in the campaign was to reassert the Labour Party's respectability.[1] The memory of the General Strike continued to haunt Labour candidates in the 1929 general election. The charge of unconstitutional behaviour was hurled at them from Tory and Liberal platforms, and in 1929 Labour was particularly sensitive to this because there were signs of strain in the accommodation between the other two parties which might allow Labour to capture seats. In the South, East and Central the arrangement stood, but in Bristol West the Liberals, who had contested the 1928 by-election, again put up a candidate.[2] There had been signs since 1926 that many Liberals were disturbed that a policy of mere anti-socialism inevitably pointed to conservatism, and there was something of a Liberal revival in Bristol, as elsewhere, during the later 1920s. In Bristol North there was considerable questioning of the stand of Captain F. E. Guest who by this time had become indistinguishable from the Conservatives. In 1929 a breakaway Liberal and Radical Association was formed in Bristol North, with the support of the Western Counties Liberal Federation, who withdrew official support from Guest.[3] The split vote in Bristol North thus presented the Labour Party with an opportunity of regaining the seat.

But the Liberal revival, and their assertion of independence on a platform of non-socialist reformism, seemed to pose dangers to the Labour Party, particularly at a time when it was attempting to attract

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1. W.D.P., 24 January - 2 February 1928; B.T.M., ibid.
2. W.D.P., 11 May 1929.
3. W.D.P., 16-24 January 1929.

middle class voters. In the event the Liberal revival was not a serious challenge to Labour, which swept in with victories in four out of the five Bristol seats, and a greatly increased share of the poll. In Bristol East Labour captured 65.8% of the vote; this represented the peak of the Labour Party's electoral achievement during the inter-war period.[1] Working class discontent with the Tory Government proved sufficiently strong to carry Labour to victory in the East, North, South and Central divisions, and the middle class vote did not prove decisive. But the Liberal revival had an effect on the Labour campaign. Unemployment was the central issue, and the one on which Labour scored most off the Tories. This would have been the case even if the Liberal Party had not come forward with a campaign based on the Liberal proposals to cure unemployment. But the Labour Party approached the campaign as if this was not the case, and with the fear that the Liberal threat to Labour's ability to attract middle class votes would be the decisive factor in the campaign. Thus Labour candidates were desperate to assert their respectability, even more than their radicalism. Walkden, for example, addressing a meeting of businessmen at the Corn Exchange, assured them that the Labour Party '... is alive to the necessity of maintaining stability and confidence in the business world. We act on constitutional lines, and have no connection with the Communist party. The Labour Party stands for England and Empire, and a sound English policy of development. We are opposed to strikes and industrial disturbance. We tried to prevent the General Strike in 1926, and it was not the fault of the trades unions that it came about.'[2]

The sweeping Labour gains in 1929 set the seal on the triumph of 'MacDonaldism' not only within the Parliamentary Labour Party, but also

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1. F. S. Craig, op.cit.
2. W.D.P., 18 May 1929.

in the constituencies, and indeed, throughout the Labour movement. Just as in the general elections of 1922, 1923, and 1924, so in 1929, socialism was hardly mentioned by Labour candidates, and nationalisation played no part at all. Labour's most radical proposal was for a surtax on the rich, to reduce the national debt, and thus enable the Government to concentrate more on social reforms. The prevailing assumption in the movement was that this was not the time to be talking about socialism; rather it was the opportunity for extending and consolidating the electoral gains of the past few years, and for demonstrating Labour's respectability and fitness to govern.

A meeting of the Bristol East C.L.P. in September 1929 was addressed by the South West Regional Organiser and the party's Women's Organiser. They stressed that the Labour Party should make no rash promises now that it was in Government, for this could only lead to disillusionment.[1] The strategy of the Labour Government was to be an essentially moderate one. They also warned that the Government's problems were not '... so much with the Liberals and Tories, but with the specious bickerings of the rank and file.'[2] Yet, whatever difficulties MacDonald might have experienced with his parliamentary 'rank and file', the most striking fact about the Bristol Labour movement at this time was the weakness of opposition to the policies of the Government, and the fact that the I.L.P., which was becoming increasingly critical of the parliamentary leadership, lost much of its support for precisely this reason.

In 1927 the I.L.P. was at the peak of its influence in Bristol. It claimed 800 members in the Central branch alone.[3] It carried on vigorous propaganda work, and a wide range of social and educational

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., September 1929.
2. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., September 1929.
3. I.L.P., Mins., April 1927.

activities which were not available elsewhere in the movement, except through the Co-operative movement. An active ward organisation had been maintained, and during 1927 the I.L.P. re-started ward groups in Sea Mills and Horfield.[1] But it was at the point where the I.L.P. was at the peak of its influence locally that many of its members, and members of the Labour Party, began to question the relationship between the two. In 1928 the B.L.W. opened a debate on the subject. Its editor, R. Neft, who was himself an I.L.P. member, argued that the I.L.P. '... has finished its task, which was the creating of a party of the workers independent of other parties. That party has now been established, and there is no need for an I.L.P. organisation to preach independent politics, because the Labour Party is independent. ... Let the I.L.P. die.'[2] Another contributor was more brutal. 'In a few industrial centres,' he wrote, 'the Hardie tradition lingers in the branches, but its general vitality is ebbing. Since the war there has swarmed into its ranks a rabble of non-socialist Christian Pacifists, middle class currency cranks, and sentimental non-conformist lay preachers, all of whom might have found a serene sanctuary in the Salvation Army or the Primrose League.'[3]

The challenge was taken up by the I.L.P. secretary, Berriman.[4] 'The I.L.P.,' he replied, 'is required more today than at any other time, especially within the Labour movement, to help convert that great mass of Labour voters who are not conscious socialists, and the members of trade unions who pay their political levy but have not a socialist outlook.'[5] This was a restatement of the I.L.P.'s basic raison d'etre within the movement; but commitment to such a task inevitably placed

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1. I.L.P., Mins., September, November 1927.
2. B.L.W., 11 February 1928.
3. ibid.
4. For Berriman, see Biographical Appendix, p.396.
5. B.L.W., 11 February 1928.

the I.L.P. in opposition to the policies of MacDonald, and the mood of loyalty to the parliamentary leadership. It also had already involved opposition to the collaborationist policies being pursued by the T.U.C. The Cook-Maxton manifesto, issued in 1928, and the campaign surrounding it, were a direct response to 'Mondism'. In their manifesto Cook and Maxton attacked the idea that the Labour Party '... is no longer a class party, but a party representative of all sections of the community. ... We can no longer stand by and see 30 years of devoted work destroyed in making peace with Capitalism, and compromises with the political philosophy of our capitalist opponents.'[1] They therefore launched a series of public meetings at which the 'rank and file' would be 'asked to state whether they accept the new outlook, or whether they wish to remain true to the spirit and ideals which animated the early pioneers.' The Bristol I.L.P. supported the campaign and organised a rally in August 1928.[2]

The response was weak, and the main effect of the campaign was to antagonise wide sections of the movement, without evoking a sympathetic response among the rank and file trades unionists at whom it was aimed. Collaborationist policies were not new to the period after the general strike; if the opposition to such policies had been weak in Bristol before 1926, how much more difficult was it to build a rank and file movement after a shattering defeat had engendered apathy and disillusionment. The I.L.P.'s failure to relate its politics to the problems faced by rank and file trades unionists before the General Strike ensured that the Cook-Maxton campaign would fall flat on its face.

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1. K. Middlemas, The Clydesiders, (1965), p.216.
2. I.L.P., Mins., June-July 1928.

Moreover, there was little clear understanding in the movement of the significance of the Mond Turner talks within the local movement generally. The B.L.W. was constantly decrying the idea of peace between the classes, and was constantly stressing the class nature of the issues that faced Labour representatives on the Council or the Guardians. Yet on the question of Mondism, which was founded on the assumption that peace between the classes was both possible and desirable, the B.L.W. editorials ignored the glaring class issues. An editorial on Mondism argued that 'The Labour movement will live through it all, and whatever the result it makes no difference to the vote for socialism at the next general election. The B.L.W. has always held that Mondism can make no difference to the great mass of the working class. But it can make a difference to the trade union movement. The trade unions ... have spent many years and much money to obtain recognition from the employers. These conversations offered a means to this end.'[1] Because of the belief in the fundamental split between trades union and political action, and in its corollary that whatever the unions did had no relevance to the political struggle, the author of this article, and the many who shared his assumptions, failed to recognise the danger to the very independence of a major section of the movement, which was always claimed to be its distinguishing feature. They failed also to see the similarity between the collaborationist policies being pursued by the T.U.C. and those of the MacDonald leadership in the Labour Party, and neglected to oppose either.

The I.L.P. received several complaints from prominent members such as Councillors Burgess and Rogers for supporting the Cook-Maxton

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1. B.L.W., 25 August 1928.

manifesto, which was condemned for undermining the unity of the movement.[1] As the I.L.P. moved to the left and began to adopt a more oppositional stand, its estrangement from the local movement increased. Although in 1929 Berriman claimed that no political group enjoyed such influence as the I.L.P., signs of decline were already apparent.[2] Membership of the Central branch had fallen from its 1927 peak of 800 to 500 in 1930, only 340 of whom were fully paid up.[3] Part of this decline reflected the more difficult economic circumstances of working class members. But reduced membership meant a shortage of finance, and thus a threat to the propaganda and social work of the I.L.P. During 1930, as the I.L.P. group of M.P.s were becoming increasingly critical of the Labour Government, the local I.L.P. began to lose many of its prominent local members. In January, Rogers resigned 'owing to the attitude of the I.L.P. towards the Labour Government.'[4] In May, Alderman Sennington and Parker followed.[5] Between April 1930 and April 1931 some 100 members resigned for this reason, and there was a growing realisation within the I.L.P. that sooner or later they would be '... forced to clearly define their relationship with the Labour Party, and possibly face an attempt on the part of the Labour Party to exclude the I.L.P.'[6]

Even when the electorate began to show signs of disillusionment with the Labour Party, there was little disposition within the party to question the performance of the Government. At the municipal elections in 1930, when Labour expected to continue its string of successes and capture five seats, the result was inconclusive; neither party won nor lost seats. But this was the first time since 1925 that the Labour Party had failed to make any gains. Moreover, even in the working class

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1. I.L.P., Mins., August 1928.
2. ibid., April 1929.
3. ibid., April 1930.
4. ibid., January 1930.
5. ibid., May 1930.
6. ibid., April 1930.

wards, the Labour vote was reduced. In the East and West, post-mortems were held; the former tended to seek explanations in the failings of the electoral machine, and to demand organisational solutions.[1] In the West, on the other hand, there was some admission that dissatisfaction with the Labour government was a factor in the local elections.[2] Yet even this admission was swamped by the tendency to blame the perversity of the electorate rather than any actual failings of the Government, and there was little sign of disillusionment within the Labour Party itself. When the Bristol East C.L.P. was called upon to fight a by-election in January 1931, following the death of Baker, it was able to mount its most enthusiastic campaign to date, drawing on the services of 700 election workers.[3] Again the main issue was unemployment, and although Cripps retained the seat easily, the Labour majority was slightly down, on a greatly reduced poll.[4] It may be that some Labour voters expressed their disillusionment with the Labour Government in this election, although there are obvious difficulties in interpreting a by-election result, on a greatly reduced poll, in this way. What does seem clear is that the loyalty of working class voters in East Bristol to the Labour Party, built up over the previous ten years, remained largely intact.

II) The 1931 crisis

The events of August 1931 took both the Labour Party and its supporters completely by surprise. There had been no preparation within the Labour movement for the possibility that MacDonald might be prepared to sacrifice the independence of the movement to the

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., November 1930.
2. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., November 1930.
3. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., January 1931.
4. W.D.P., 6-16 January 1931; B.T.M., ibid.

'national interest'. Nevertheless, there was no doubting the attitude of the various Labour organisations locally. A special B.L.P. meeting convened immediately the news broke, expressed its total opposition to the National Government, and the C.L.P.s followed suit.[1] Of the M.P.s, Ayles, Alpass and Walkden announced their opposition,[2] but there was initially some doubt about the attitude of Cripps, who was away in Switzerland. By the time the East C.L.P. met to discuss the crisis in September however, his outright opposition was clear.[3]

At first there was no realisation in the Labour Party of the shattering blow it had suffered. Rogers wrote to Cripps in September full of confidence; '... the change of government does not appear to injure our position locally; so far only six individual members have resigned from the party on account of our attitude towards the National Government, and these were sleeping members, therefore the party has lost nothing and gained much out of the present crisis.'[4] But at the annual meeting of the party in 1932, Rogers painted a different picture. He reported a total of between 400 and 500 resignations since the previous August.[5] The losses at the polls were even more alarming. At the October general election the National Government almost swept the board in Bristol; only Cripps of the four Bristol Labour M.P.s, retained his seat, and he by the very narrow margin of 411 votes. Labour's share of the votes dropped to 50.6% in the East, whilst elsewhere, only in the Central could the party muster more than 40%.[6] The Labour

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1. W.D.P., 27 August 1931; B.T.M., ibid.
2. ibid.
3. E. Estorick, Sir Stafford Cripps, (London 1949), p.100.
4. H. E. Rogers to Cripps, 11 September 1931.
5. Bristol East C.L.P., 1932 Annual Report, (Stafford Cripps papers, Nuffield College Library).
6. F. S. Craig, op.cit.

Party was pushed back to the position it had occupied before the 1922 general election. Much the same was true in the Municipal elections. In November the Citizen Party gained five seats, the first time that the Labour Party had conceded seats to its opponents since 1924. Labour suffered most in those wards where it had only recently made gains - St. Augustine, Redcliff and Southville, but it lost seats also in its strongholds of Easton and the two Bedminster wards, whilst even in St. George and St. Phillip its vote was greatly reduced.[1]

But these setbacks were temporary. In 1933 the trend at municipal elections was reversed with the capture of a seat in Stapleton, and in 1934 four of the earlier losses were made good. Electorally, the party demonstrated that its relationship with working class voters was remarkably resilient. In membership too, the losses were not shattering. There were no significant defections by prominent members such as councillors, and the essential unity of the movement was maintained. Despite the resignations from Bristol East C.L.P., that party's membership returns for 1932 were higher than in the previous year. A mass recruiting drive by Rogers on the basis of a new membership scheme enabled the party to build an enormous membership base. In some other divisions, too, the party's membership resumed its upward climb after 1932, as can be seen from the table below.

Table VII Membership of the Labour Party in five local divisions[2] 1929-1939

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Central	500	500	567	527	843	536	476	500	443	734	568
East	775	900	2368	2494	2566	1913	1794	2059	1902	1660	1416
North	600	600	722	635	526	591	583	800	541	505	532
South	1020	1020	800	1700	1000	1000	1200	1210	1000	1260	1100
West	736	617	678	525	750	1075	1113	1124	1058	913	746

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1. W.D.P., 2 November 1931; B.T.M., ibid.
2. Labour Party, Annual Reports, passim.

The crisis of 1931 caused the Labour movement to take stock of itself, in a way that the defeat of 1926 had not. Yet the remarkable fact about the aftermath of 1931 was that the Labour Party did not fundamentally change direction. The betrayal of MacDonald was seen very largely in terms of his own personal opportunism and his desire to ingratiate himself with the establishment. Bevin, who represented a considerable body of opinion within the unions, concluded that MacDonald had no commitment to the movement's independence since he was essentially a middle class intellectual. Only the trade unions, he believed, could be relied upon as the guardians of the movement's independence.[1] Very few drew the conclusion that what was at fault was the whole orientation of Labour politics, and its failure to embrace a clearly socialist programme to match its electoral independence.[2] The concept of the 'National Interest', which transcended all class and sectional interests, permeated Labour ideology, and not merely at the level of the parliamentary leadership. MacDonald's policies had been based on this concept, and the position he took in 1931 was a logical continuation of the drift of Labour Party policy over the previous period.

Nevertheless, MacDonald's actions in 1931 were offensive to the broad mass of the movement. Firstly, he threatened to undermine the electoral independence which had been established. But this independence was not seen as the basis for projecting working class demands onto the parliamentary stage. Rather it was seen as an essential bulwark of the parliamentary system. Thus the East C.L.P., in the wake of the crisis, issued a pamphlet entitled Preserve Parliament and make it

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1. A. Bullock, op.cit., ch. 18.
2. For a discussion on this question, see above, pp.230-241.

effective for democracy.[1] The coalition, it was argued, undermined the parliamentary system by subverting the two party system. Secondly, the coalition offended also against the class instincts of the movement's rank and file; but again, those instincts had not crystallised into independent class politics. Rather had they been reconciled with the concept of the national interest through the belief that the working class, through its political organisation the Labour Party, was the only force which could truly embrace the wider interests of the nation as a whole. Their objection to MacDonald was not so much that he had failed to pursue socialist policies, but that his actions presented a threat to parliamentary democracy, and that his so-called 'National' Government was in fact representative only of the employing class.

Labour's 1931 election campaign was, if anything, more orthodox than previous campaigns. It is true that nationalisation was much more of an issue than previously, and that Cripps posed the issues at stake as being the conflict between capitalism and socialism. 'Capitalism has broken down,' he told an election meeting. 'The Labour Party has got to eliminate the privileged classes, and has got to control the sources of finance and trade.'[2] But Labour was fighting an overwhelmingly defensive campaign. Walkden, for example, called on people to 'Vote for Walkden', Peace, Progress, and Free Trade.'[3] Nor was his approach unusual. Lansbury also told a local election rally that the issue was free trade versus protection,[4] whilst Labour speakers also dwelt at length on the question of balancing the budget. Cripps accepted the necessity for a balanced budget as readily as did some of

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., Preserve Parliament and make it effective for Democracy, 1932.
2. W.D.P., 12 October 1931.
3. Bristol South C.L.P., Election address, 1931.
4. W.D.P., 19 October 1931.

his more conservative colleagues.[1] This was not the kind of campaign that was likely to inspire confidence in the Labour Party. If orthodoxy were required, the Tories and Liberals were the traditional guardians of such policies. Meanwhile for those who were suffering from the operation of orthodox economic policies, notably the unemployed, Labour had very little alternative to offer. The Unemployed indeed showed considerable scepticism towards the Labour Party. A meeting of the Unemployed Association addressed by Walkden and Alpass dissolved in uproar with cries of 'traitor' being hurled from the floor.[2]

Miliband has aptly described the Labour Party in the 1930s as being the party of 'MacDonaldism without MacDonald'.[3] The main effect of the soul-searching that followed MacDonald's defection was an overhaul of the internal life of the movement. Nationally this involved a much keener interest in Labour Party affairs by the unions and the increasing use of the union block votes to control party policy. The I.L.P.'s position within the party became increasingly untenable, for even though the I.L.P. group in Parliament had opposed MacDonald, they were regarded more as disruptive middle class intellectuals than as the upholders of the party's traditions. Attempts to discipline the I.L.P. members led to that party's disaffiliation from the Labour Party in 1932.[4] In August 1932 the local branches followed the national lead and disaffiliated. The B.L.W. dismissed the event as insignificant. 'For some time,' the writer noted, 'the Bristol I.L.P., like the I.L.P. generally, has been steadily losing ground, and more and more have the C.L.P.s become the spearhead of the movement.'[5] Following the

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1. W.D.P., 22 October 1931; see also, R. Skidelsky, Politicians and the Slump, (1970). Chapter I of this book contains a discussion on the economic orthodoxy of the inter-war period, including the linked issues of the gold standard and the balancing of the budget. For the Labour Party's attitude to economic orthodoxy, see pp. 52-55 and 59-61.
2. W.D.P., 12 October 1931.
3. R. Miliband, op.cit., ch. 7.
4. R. E. Dowse, op.cit., ch. 12.
5. Quoted in B.E.P., 12 August 1932.

disaffiliation the I.L.P. suffered an immediate loss of membership, as Labour Party members threw in their I.L.P. cards rather than, as they saw it, split the movement. L. J. Poole was among the more laconic of those who resigned. 'It is my earnest hope,' he wrote, 'for the future well-being of this country, and of socialism, that the new I.L.P., together with its misguided leaders will rapidly disappear from the field of English politics.'[1]

The departure of the I.L.P. from the mainstream of the Labour movement left a gap in its provisions for educational and social activities, although the C.L.P.s had already begun to take these matters more seriously before the disaffiliation, as part of the regeneration in the internal life of the movement that followed the crisis of 1931. This regeneration operated at many levels. The electoral machinery was overhauled after the failures at the polls. There had been complaints before 1931 that the B.L.P. had degenerated into a debating society which was 'lacking in constructive effort, and neglected to co-ordinate in an effective way the important party work,'[2] a B.L.P. reorganisation committee was set up in 1932, and recommended changes in its organisation.[3] But the major changes occurred at the level of the C.L.P.s. The Bristol East C.L.P., in particular, instigated a comprehensive scheme of reorganisation designed to enable the party to rebuild the electoral support it had enjoyed before 1931.[4] The scheme was the work of the secretary Rogers, with the backing of Cripps. He advocated 'energetic well-organised propaganda', including indoor meetings in different parts of the constituency every month during the winter, to

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1. L. J. Poole to Berriman, 2 August 1932, (I.L.P. papers).
2. Bristol East C.L.P., papers, Report of B.L.P. Reorganisation Committee, 1932.
3. ibid.
4. Bristol East C.L.P., papers, Report on 1931 election, and proposed Scheme of Future Work, December 1931.

be addressed by Cripps, and outdoor meetings in the summer, including at least one weekly meeting in each ward, plus the quarterly distribution to each house in the constituency of a four page leaflet containing a report from Cripps of his activity in the House.[1]

The organisation of women was recognised as an area where the Labour Party was weak, and where special attention was required. A Central Women's Committee, of four delegates from each ward section, was set up, and within the wards more social and propaganda work should be organised for the women.[2] These efforts met with some considerable success. The female membership of the party increased markedly, so that by 1933 women accounted for almost half the total.[3] In election matters, too, the East C.L.P. built an election machine that was renowned for its efficiency. In March 1932 the Regional Organiser told the General Council that Bristol East was 'becoming known as a model division.'[4]

In a number of other ways the party sought to extend its influence. In 1932 women's groups were formed on the new housing estates at St. Anne's and Speedwell.[5] In attempting to draw women into the party, there was a need for more flexibility in organisation, and smaller units than ward sections were often necessary if women were to be able to participate. Hence in the East there was even a 'Gladstone St. Women's Section.'[6] These groups represented an important contribution to the extension of the Labour Party organisation into the new council housing estates. Thus in the North, a Hillfields women's section was formed in 1927;[7] it was not until 1936, when the area was on the point

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., papers, Report on 1931 election, and proposed Scheme of Future Work, December 1931.
2. ibid.
3. Labour Party, Annual Report, 1933.
4. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Minutes, March 1932.
5. St. George West, Women's Section, Mins., January 1932.
6. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., April 1934.
7. B.L.W., 10 September 1927.

of being constituted as a new ward, that a full Labour Party group was established there, preparatory to the creation of a ward party.[1] The West C.L.P., however, established separate groups on the new housing estates well in advance of ward reorganisation. The Sea Mills group was set up in 1928,[2] and Southmead in 1932, the latter with direct representation on the General Council.[3] In the South, too, an early start was made on the Knowle housing estate when a committee was formed there in 1927 to co-ordinate party work, in conjunction with the parent party.[4]

Youth work was an area where the party was forced to take over from the I.L.P. Before 1918 the only young people's section in the movement had been the I.L.P.'s Band of Young Socialists, which in 1918 was reformed as a Socialist Sunday School.[5] Even after the formation of the C.L.P.s the recruitment of young people was left to the I.L.P. But there was some realisation in the Labour Party that youth work was an important aspect of individual membership. As early as 1923 a Young Labour League for the 10-12 year olds was flourishing in Bristol East.[6] In 1925, a branch of the Labour League of Youth was formed in the East.[7] The Executive of the party in London urged C.L.P.s to take up the organisation of youth in 1928, but little was achieved in the other Bristol divisions.[8] No stable League of Youth branch was formed in the West until 1933,[9] and in the North and South there was little activity.

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1. Hillfields Group Labour Party, Mins., 1936-1939.
2. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., May 1928.
3. ibid., March-April 1932.
4. B.L.W., 10 September 1927.
5. I.L.P., Mins., February 1918.
6. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., April 1923.
7. ibid., July 1925.
8. Bristol North C.L.P., G.C. Mins., December 1928.
9. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., September 1934.

In the wake of 1931 and the I.L.P. disaffiliation local C.L.P.s looked at youth work more seriously. In Bristol East, in January 1932, the youth section was reorganised with groups in each ward.[1] Membership increased with activity, but still there were difficulties. Youth Work was not regarded as a key area and tended to be left to the women's sections to organise, for it was seen as part of the social work of the movement, rather than as part of the recruiting and political effort. The C.L.P.s had neglected social activity while the I.L.P. had been willing to provide it, and this was another gap in the movement's coverage. Moreover, such social activities as were arranged tended to be money-making ventures, and intended as an essential ancillary to the electoral effort, rather than, as was the case with the I.L.P., designed to bind the members more closely to the branch, and thus create a more cohesive unit.[2]

In the East, with the mass membership in the early 1930s, this was a particularly acute problem, as was the need to keep public representatives in touch with the rank and file. Thus even without the I.L.P.'s disaffiliation the East C.L.P. would have had to tackle the need for social activity. Moreover, after 1930, contests in the St. George wards became almost non-existent, and the role of social activity thus shifted to being one of compensating for the lack of any electoral activity to sustain interest in the party.[3] It was significant that the work of the party's social committee was carried mainly by the St. George West ward.[4] The array of social activities organised by the East C.L.P. was impressive. Monthly socials were held in each ward, and in 1931 an annual party outing was begun.[5] In 1932 the party acquired

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., January 1932.
2. Bristol North C.L.P., G.C. Mins. The main social activities in this division were money-raising bazaars.
3. Between 1930 and 1938 there were no contests in St. George West, and only two in St. George East.
4. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., March 1935.
5. ibid. September 1931; the first outing was to Cripps' country home in Gloucestershire. 1200 people were conveyed there in a fleet of 42 charabancs.

new and more extensive premises. For the first time the party possessed a hall of its own for propaganda meetings, whilst part of the premises was converted into a Labour club, the first in Bristol,[1] which became an important part of the social and political life of the area. Indeed, so important did social activity become to the work of the party, in the absence of electoral contests, that Rogers admitted in 1937 that political work and ward organisation had been neglected and allowed to fall into decay.[2]

The I.L.P. had seen its main role as the propagation of socialist ideas within the Labour movement and among the electorate at large. The C.L.P.s, for the most part, were content to allow it to carry this burden. But in 1926, in the aftermath of the General Strike, attempts to remedy the movement's deficiencies in this area were made when a newspaper was established. The I.L.P.'s efforts to found a Bristol Forward in 1914, and again in 1916, have already been noted. In 1921 it considered trying again but failed through lack of support.[3] In 1926, however, a Bristol Newspaper Society was formed and, in June, convened a meeting of representatives from the Divisions to discuss the idea of a local Labour newspaper.[4] The initiative thus launched was taken up by the West C.L.P. which decided to establish a West Bristol Labour Weekly, to run for a trial period of 26 weeks.[5] The Editorial and Management Committee of the paper consisted of the more intellectual members of the West C.L.P. - Barker, St. John Reade, Neft, Ellerby and Jahans, as well as A. W. Cox, the Co-op. political secretary. The first

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., July 1932.
2. H. B. R. Rogers to Cripps, 30 November 1937, (Cripps' papers).
3. I.L.P., Mins., January-February 1921.
4. Bristol North C.L.P., G.C. Mins., June 1926.
5. T.U.C., 1931 Congress Bristol, Souvenir Handbook.

issue appeared in September 1926, and was reported to have had a good reception.[1] During the six month trial period, however, the West C.L.P. found that it could not support such a costly venture for long.

In March 1927, therefore, the paper was taken over by the Bristol Newspaper Society and renamed the Bristol Labour Weekly, which was able to draw on a wider basis of support.[2] The C.L.P.s and wards took over the task of distribution and sales, and advertised their meetings and activities. The unions also responded. A regular column of trade union notes was a feature of the paper. Some unions took shares in the venture. The N.U.B.S.O. branch at Kingswood was among these, and distributed copies through its shop stewards.[3] In 1928 the T.G.W.U. Works Committee at Fry's agreed that they 'ought to do their best to make the sale of the paper a success,'[4] and copies were sold in the works. The newspaper filled an important gap in the local movement's infra-structure. Besides acting as an information medium, it also had an important educational and propagandist role, for the members of the Labour Party and the unions; but it was aimed too, at a wider audience, especially at election times, when it became the practice to publish the Labour Party municipal manifesto in the B.L.W.

A newspaper alone could not meet the educational needs of the movement.[5] In some C.L.P.s this work continued to be ignored. There was very little evidence of any systematic educational work in the North or South C.L.P.s. In the West, the first sign of educational activity

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1. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., September 1926.
2. ibid., March 1927.
3. N.U.B.S.O., Kingswood Branch, Mins., Feb. 1928.
4. T.G.W.U., Frys' Works Committee, Mins., May 1928.
5. Very little is known about the formation of the B.L.W. owing to lack of source material. Few copies of this newspaper have survived, although one bound volume from the period September 1927 to August 1928 has been located. This has now been microfilmed and deposited in the University of Bristol Library. It should be noted in passing that the B.L.W. was a remarkable achievement for the Labour movement in Bristol. Regular weekly editions were published throughout the 1930s and the newspaper was revived after the war, continuing production until some time in the 1950s.

was in 1934 when it was agreed to start a training class for election workers, although even this was not finally working until 1936.[1] In the East the importance of education and propaganda was recognised in the wake of the 1931 crisis. The party sought explanations for its losses at the polls in terms of organisational deficiencies. But it also recognised that it had neglected to propagate socialist ideas, not only among the electorate at large, but also amongst its own members.[2] After 1931 internal education was taken up more seriously by the East C.L.P. A Mock Parliament was established to assist in the training of speakers. The General Council urged that ward meetings should have some educational value, and outside speakers were invited to party meetings.[3] But education in the fundamentals of socialism required more specialised and detailed attention than was possible in a ward meeting, and of this there was very little.

The Co-operative Education Committee and the N.C.L.C. were the two main sources of education within the movement. Both had able and energetic full-time secretaries. Cox, who won election as a councillor, co-ordinated the educational work of the Co-op,[4] which was carried on through the Guilds, and through special weekend schools. Meanwhile, under the aegis of W. Coldrick, the N.C.L.C. in Bristol became much more integrated into the local movement's official structure than it had been previously. He concentrated on making himself acceptable to the trades union officials, and on dispelling the left-wing image that the N.C.L.C. had possessed. The most successful classes he organised were those for prospective municipal candidates, who were trained in the workings of local government.[5] Important though this work was to the Labour Party,

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1. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., November 1934; Feb. 1935.
2. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., December 1931.
3. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., December 1931.
4. Cox came to Bristol from Northampton in 1921 to take up the post of B.C.S. Political and Education Secretary. He entered the Council for Easton Ward in 1927. (Labour Who's Who, 1927).
5. Conversation with the author. Coldrick came to Bristol from South Wales in 1927. He was an ex-miner, and a graduate of the Labour College in London, which he entered in 1919, a contemporary of Aneurin Bevan.

it reflected again an orientation of the movement towards the more mundane tasks of electioneering. Neither the Co-operative nor the N.C.L.C. provided much in the way of political education.

The development of the movement's infra-structure marked an important stage in its growth, for it created the possibility of binding the membership into a more cohesive unit, and thus of building a more self-reliant political and social force. Only in Bristol East, where electoral considerations were not so pressing as elsewhere, did a 'movement' in this sense begin to emerge. And even there, but more so elsewhere, the organisation of youth and women, social and educational activity, were regarded as essentially servicing operations, designed to back up the electoral effort. Whilst for a party whose primary aim was the capture of political power through the ballot box, electoral considerations were inevitably uppermost, the Labour movement, as an expression of class identity, had to be more than a mere electoral machine if it were to contribute to the development of a wider socialist consciousness. By the 1930s all the C.L.P.s in varying degrees, were building a mass membership. The East C.L.P. was most successful in this, and this was the party which faced most acutely the problem of how to transform a large paper membership into a dedicated, conscious body of party activists, especially since it had to fight fewer elections, and so in some wards could not count on the annual election campaign to draw a largely passive membership into party activity. Inevitably in a membership of over 2000 there would be different levels of commitment and involvement, and the East C.L.P., among local parties, managed to involve a larger number of members than elsewhere in party activity. But the high turnover of membership, and the fact that even when educational classes and social events were organised, they were often poorly attended, indicates that the East C.L.P. had by no means solved the problems that a mass membership brought in its train.

III) The Socialist League

The committed party activists were a comparatively small proportion of total party membership. Nevertheless, in terms of on-going party activity in all fields they were the key factor. Among this group there were special problems in their relationship with the Labour Party and the movement as a whole. There was a tendency for them, working in the constituencies, to feel isolated within a vast national organisation, made up as it was of several diverse elements. There was also a feeling of powerlessness, and of inability to influence the direction of the party. There was thus a constant danger, even among this group, of apathy and disillusionment. These feelings were well expressed in an article in the Socialist Leaguer in 1934:

'It is no good our leaders retorting that there is plenty to keep us busy in the ordinary routine work of local party activities. Lots of us are doing our full share of that work, and fully accepting the necessity of carrying on with it. But routine activities do not satisfy the soul. ... People want to know and feel that they are engaged in a battle. Our leaders seem to think that a route march - strictly at attention - is a satisfactory substitute.'[1]

Pimlott has argued that the formation of the Socialist League in 1932 was an attempt to provide a means of overcoming this isolation by providing the frustrated rank and file activists with an organised voice within the party. He points to the I.L.P.'s disaffiliation as a loss to the Labour Party 'loyalist left' of a focus for its opposition to the leadership's policies. Yet Cripps, a founder member of the League, had

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1. Quoted in B. Pimlott, 'The Socialist League': in Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 6, 1971, pp.12-38.

never been a member of the I.L.P.[1] In Bristol, of the former I.L.P. members who became leading S.L. members in the 1930s, most, like Rogers, had resigned their I.L.P. membership long before that body disaffiliated from the Labour Party, whilst others, such as St. John Reade and R. Barker, had never been I.L.P. members.[2] Those left-wing elements who had remained loyal to MacDonald and the parliamentary leadership before the crisis had ceased to look to the I.L.P. as a focus of opposition long before disaffiliation, and indeed had submerged their own socialist leanings in the interests of party unity. But in the wake of MacDonald's betrayal, and the subsequent failure of the Labour Party to learn the lessons from this crisis and to break out of the politics that had led to it, a number of leading party members in Bristol began to place greater emphasis on the importance of a more vigorous advocacy of socialist policies, and thereby came into conflict with the party leadership.

The East C.L.P. was one of the main sources of support for the League in Bristol.[3] This was only partly the result of Cripps' influence, for the existence of a group of activists subject to the frustrations and pressures outlined above was of crucial importance there. In the coming period the East C.L.P. lined up behind Cripps in his advocacy of more forthright policies. The 1932 Annual Conference of the Labour Party, in the wake of the 1931 crisis and general election, was generally agreed to have been a success for the left. The party committed itself to a far-reaching programme of nationalisation, against the advice of the leadership.[4] These successes encouraged the left in the constituencies.

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1. In 1931, the Bristol East I.L.P. invited Cripps to become a member. Rogers wrote to him, 7 November 1931, advising that: 'There is no necessity for you to become a member of the I.L.P. I, myself, resigned that organisation two years ago, after 13 years membership. They have no influence in the district.' (Cripps papers)
2. For Reade, see Biographical Appendix, pp. 400.
3. H. E. Rogers, Conversation with the author.
4. A. Bullock, op.cit., pp.512-516.

In November 1932 a branch of the S.L. was formed in Bristol.[1] But from the start its leading personnel in Bristol reflected the two elements of left-wing politics within the movement. On the one hand, Rogers and Hennessy from the working class dominated Bristol East C.L.P. were very active members, as were others from their party. But the leading positions locally were occupied by the intellectuals of the West C.L.P. A branch of the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda had been opened in Bristol in December 1931, with St. John Meade of the West C.L.P. as secretary.[2] This was merged into the S.L. in 1932. Also prominent in the League locally were R. Barker, from Bristol West, and F. E. C. Habgood, a solicitor.[3] No prominent local trades unionists were associated with the group, and there was thus some justification in the suspicion held by many at the time, and since, that the S.L. reflected the frustrations of middle-class intellectuals in a proletarian party. Yet the League attracted a considerable measure of support among constituency activists in Bristol, and in 1936, Rogers estimated that it had a membership of 150.[4]

Initially the League set out to be a propagandist and educational body. It organised monthly meetings to discuss 'various aspects of socialist policy and the application of socialist principles.'[5] Its conferences on the dangers of fascism and of war were well attended.[6] But when it began to operate as a pressure group within the Labour Party, it encountered resistance. The main field of activity was the annual party conference, and after 1932 the League enjoyed very little success.

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1. St. George West Ward Labour Party, Women's Section, Mins., November 1932.
2. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., December 1931.
3. B.E.P. 23 August 1935. Habgood was chairman, and Barker, Secretary of the branch.
4. H. E. Rogers to a friend, 7 February 1936.
5. H. E. Rogers, conversation with the author.
6. Bristol South C.L.P., G.C. Mins. April 1935; September 1935.

The trades union block votes were brought to bear to ensure the defeat of League-inspired resolutions, some of which were passed by the East C.L.P. for forwarding to conference.[1] The conflict between the unions, with Bevin as the leading spokesman of conservative trade union opinion, and the left, variously described as the intellectual left, or the constituency left, was beginning to take shape. It came to a head at the 1934 conference in Southport when a League attempt to amend the Labour Party policy document was heavily defeated; and at the 1935 conference when, in the debate on Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia, the conference repudiated Lansbury's pacifism, and came down in support of the use of League of Nations sanctions against Italy. The League opposed this policy partly because of its pacifism, still a very strong force on the Labour left, and partly because it distrusted the use which the National Government might make of Labour support for a more belligerent foreign policy. But the League was effectively isolated at the conference.[2]

Following the 1935 conference League members began to think again about the possibilities of changing the direction of Labour Party policy. Habgood, who had been adopted as candidate for Bristol Central in the approaching general election, resigned from the Labour Party in protest against the decision on sanctions. This action was written off by Hennessy, on behalf of the B.L.P., as irrelevant.[3] But two weeks later he was joined by Barker, who criticised the use of the trades union block vote at conference and on the B.L.P. 'The uneasiness and distrust of the rank and file in the party is growing day by day,' he wrote.[4] 'Workers feel that the hope of socialism and peace is a vain one. And this is not a matter of surprise when they watch the trade union leaders make allies

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1. A. Bullock, op.cit., Ch. 19.
2. ibid., pp.552-3.
3. B.L.P., 7 October 1935.
4. ibid., 19 October 1935.

with the Government which they have attacked since 1931. The Labour Party cannot ask people to vote against the Government. They are now bound to it.'[1]

The resignation of two middle class members of the League, just before a general election, added weight to the suspicions of many in the movement that such people's criticisms could not be taken seriously, because they were unreliable, just as MacDonald had been. The point that the unions were the only solid base of the movement was driven home by the T.G.W.U. when, at short notice, it provided one of its own candidates to replace Habgood in Bristol Central.[2] This charge has been echoed by Bevin's biographer, who has written of the leadership of the League that, 'They suffered from an opposition mentality, and still thought of politics as an indefinite perpetuation of University Labour Clubs in which nothing more serious was at stake than a resolution.'[3] This interpretation derives from paying too much attention to the upper echelons of the League. But, as we have seen, although the League did attract the intellectual dissidents, to whom principle was more important than the unity of the movement, it reflected also the frustrations of the ordinary rank and file constituency activist, who carried the main burden of election and party work, with very little active support from trades unionists, and yet who felt that his views could never influence the direction of the party whilst conferences were dominated by the union block votes. These people, who were constrained by considerations of party unity, nevertheless were vitally concerned about the direction in which the party was heading, and its lack of internal democracy.

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1. B.E.P., 19 October 1935.
2. D.H.P., 22 October 1935; J. J. Taylor was Political Secretary of T.G.W.U.
3. A. Bullock, op.cit., p.532.

Another reaction to the League's defeats at conferences, then, was for its members to stay in the Labour Party, but to take up questions of inner party democracy with more force, and to more openly oppose the leadership. In February 1935 Reade wrote to Cripps: 'I think there are very definite signs of a healthy rank and file revolt against the implications of Southport. If they can be properly organised, they might, I think, take us far along the right road. ... I feel strongly the importance of giving much more weight to the political organisation of the movement, and not allowing it to be strangled by the trade union and co-operative card votes. I had a letter yesterday from George Shallard, who clearly feels much the same way.'[1]

The use of the phrase, the 'rank and file', was significant. It reflected a growing consciousness of the powerlessness of the constituency activist, and the remoteness and unaccountability of the leadership. It reflected also the movement towards a more oppositional stance within the party, and the beginnings of open conflict. The main adversaries were seen as the trades union leaders, especially Bevin, who controlled the block votes. But the S.L. members also viewed the unions in terms of the apathy of their rank and file. Thus Rogers wrote in 1935: 'My experience has been that there are very few trade unionists sufficiently interested in the political movement to come to ward meetings, or anything else.'[2] There was little contact between constituency activists and rank and file trades unionists, and no appreciation by the former of the need to understand the everyday problems faced by trades unionists in order to influence them politically. The main priority, in their eyes, was to commit the Labour Party to a wide-ranging socialist programme, whether or not that would be seen by

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1. St. J. Reade to Cripps, 20 February 1935; For Shallard, see Biographical Appendix, p. 401.
2. H. E. Rogers to Labour Party Headquarters, 21 March 1933.

trades unionists to offer a solution to their problems. Yet unless the S.L. could understand and offer solutions to the problems faced by trades unionists, not only at work, but also within the largely undemocratic structures in their own unions, it could not hope to challenge the power of the union leaders within the Labour Party.

Thus the most serious failure of the S.L. was not, as has been argued by Bullock, that it failed to build links with the national union leaderships, but that it made no attempts to relate the struggle for a socialist programme to rank and file trades unionists. During the 1930s, of course, the unions appeared to be very barren ground for political agitation. But there were signs of an awakening of a more militant consciousness on the part of some rank and file trades unionists, which was coming into conflict with the same trade union leaders who were regarded as the main stumbling block to the aims of the S.L.

IV) Rank and File trades union activity

The Communist-led Minority Movement was more or less defunct by 1932, but new rank and file movements with a greater degree of autonomy from the Communist Party were by that time beginning to emerge in various unions. Most notable of these was the London Busmen's Rank and File Movement, which fell foul of Bevin on a number of occasions. Others were national in scope, and were associated with the rise in trades union membership after the mid-1930s. The Aircraft Shop Stewards' Movement in many areas was instrumental in organising weak sections of the industry, and in leading the fight for better wages and conditions, and against attempts to introduce dilution. In twelve months this movement was responsible for fourteen unofficial strikes.[1] But in

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1. B. Pearce, Some Past Rank and File Movements.

Bristol, although Shop Stewards were operating in the local aircraft and aero-engine factories, the revival of trades unionism remained firmly under the control of the local union officials, and the unofficial movement had little or no following.[1]

On the railways, however, the Railwaymen's Vigilance Movement has been claimed to have made some headway in Bristol. After the decline of the Minority Movement, C.P. members concentrated on agitation at the place of work on everyday issues of wages and conditions. This was the basis of the Vigilance movement which, in Bristol, was centred on some A.S.L.E.F. members at the Bath Road locomotive depot.[2] Support among other grades of railwaymen was limited, but a fairly strong Vigilance group was built, largely through the efforts of the few Communists who were employed in the railways, and with the help of the Movement's bulletin, the Railway Vigilant. The strategy was one of agitating on the immediate issues, and of capturing the positions in the union. Paxton was elected Vice-Chairman of his branch, and later won election to the local Departmental Committee. Later, he became the West of England representative on the Railway Council . On the railways, then, the influence of the Vigilance Movement was not inconsiderable.[3]

Overall, the evidence of rank and file trade union activity was slight. The Socialist League may be criticised partly for failing to relate to the rank and file movements that did exist, but mainly for not having any conception of the need for such organisation within the unions. Yet, if it were to achieve its aims of rank and file control of the Labour Party, then it would need to extend its influence into the unions, and this could only be achieved by relating the struggle for a socialist programme to the everyday problems faced by workers. This it entirely failed to do.

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1. A.S.U., Monthly Reports, passim; See above pp. 286-7.
2. Conversation with W. Paxton.
3. W. Paxton, Conversation with the author.

V) The struggle of the unemployed

The Socialist League had very little to offer in the way of a programme to the unemployed. The strategy of the Labour movement towards the unemployed struggle has already been analysed in a previous chapter. In 1927 the Bristol Unemployed Association (B.U.A.) was reorganised so that it came much more under the auspices of the Trades Council.[1] It set up a branch structure on a geographical basis, and was given direct representation on the Council. Membership cards were issued, and when a member found employment he was transferred to the appropriate union. Financial assistance was solicited from trades union branches and C.L.P.s on this basis. The B.U.A.'s tactics were various. Firstly, it attempted to set itself up as a trades union for the unemployed, recognised by the authorities as the intermediary through which all negotiations on benefits would be conducted. The Guardians and Council committees concerned with relief works were willing to negotiate with the B.U.A., because of its assurance that only non-militant tactics would be used.

Marches and demonstrations were scrupulously avoided. The tone of the Association's approach was set by the composition of its Management Committee, which consisted of invited representatives of City Councillors, the Guardians, the churches, and the unemployed themselves.[2] The idea was that of the Trades Council secretary, Parker. Thus again the leadership of the movement showed its unwillingness to mount a campaign which emphasised that unemployment was mainly a working class problem. Instead, they denied that it was such an issue, and their aim, as always, was to win over a wide spectrum of public opinion, hence the invitation to leading churchmen to participate. The Bishop of Malmesbury was cultivated as an ally.[3] This had two objects. On the one hand, the

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1. B.L.W., 10 September 1927.
2. W.D.P., 20 September 1927.
3. B.T.H., 17 March 1928, 14 September 1931.

association of churchmen with the B.U.A. would lend it respectability, whilst at the same time, its other aim of acting as a social and welfare body for the unemployed, to prevent 'the degradation of those who are workless,' was facilitated by the presence of a Christian influence. Lectures were organised, and an annual appeal was launched to provide a summer outing for the children of the unemployed.[1]

The respectability of the B.U.A., and its trades union character, recommended it as a form of unemployed organisation to the T.U.C. In 1927 the T.U.C. General Council disbanded the Joint Advisory Committee with the Communist led N.U.W.M., and henceforth had no link with the unemployed movement.[2] At the 1928 Congress the General Council reported that: 'Arising out of the success attained by the Bristol Trades Council in organising the unemployed workers under the auspices of the Council, the Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee gave consideration to the possibility of extending the scheme.'[3] The General Council recommended that experimental schemes be launched in various centres on the B.U.A. model. But the proposal was referred back and nothing was done officially by the T.U.C. to organise the unemployed, although in some towns Trades Council Unemployed Associations were established. At the 1932 Congress the whole question again came up for discussion and the General Council report, recommending the formation of Unemployed Associations, was accepted.[4]

By this time, however, the links between the unemployed and the official Labour movement in Bristol had been severely weakened. In May 1931 the Trades Council dissociated itself from the B.U.A., for

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1. B.T.M., 30 January 1929.
2. W. Hannington, Unemployed Struggles, (London 1936), p.140.
3. T.U.C., Congress Report, 1928.
4. T.U.C., Congress Report, 1932.

reasons unknown.[1] The secretaryship was taken over by Berriman of the I.L.P., but its policy and tactics were unchanged. In September the T.U.C. met in Bristol, amid a rising tide of working class anger over the economy cuts imposed by the National Government. Annual Congresses of the T.U.C. had regularly been accompanied by N.U.W.M. demonstrations outside the hall, demanding that a deputation be allowed to appeal to the delegates, and that the T.U.C. should take the lead in organising the fight of the unemployed.[2] Hannington and Paynter, who were both present in 1931, have both given accounts of the events outside the Victoria Rooms, and in the Horsefair, when N.U.W.M. marches, the first seen in Bristol, encountered police baton charges.[3] Many of the marchers were South Wales miners; others were local unemployed. The T.U.C. refused to receive the deputation, and the marches were denounced by the B.U.A. secretary, Berriman, as a communist stunt which 'can only inflict unnecessary suffering on those taking part.'[4]

The events of September 1931 transformed the unemployed situation in Bristol. The spectacular intervention of the N.U.W.M. at a time when the unemployed were under attack, encountering official repression on the one hand, and indifference from the Labour movement on the other, placed that body in a situation where, for the first time, it could seriously contend for the leadership of the local unemployed struggle. By October the N.U.W.M., and through it the Communist Party, was able to organise marches of the unemployed on its own account, and during the general election campaign in that month the N.U.W.M. conducted a

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1. I.L.P., Mins., May 1931.
2. W. Hannington, op.cit.
3. ibid., p.219; W. Paynter, My Generation, (1972), pp.85-87.
4. W.D.P., 3 September 1931.

campaign of denigration against the Labour Party, particularly directed at Walkden.[1] On October 13th the N.U.W.M. sent a deputation to the Council, which did not deem it expedient to refuse it a hearing.[2] The N.U.W.M. formulated a series of demands - for all relief to be paid in cash, for rent over 6s. per week to be paid by the P.A.C., for an extra coal allowance, and for trades union rates of pay to be paid for test work - and these were placed before the P.A.C. But the Committee attempted to protect its relationship with the B.U.A. by arguing that since there was already one, recognised organisation for the unemployed, it would not deal with the N.U.W.M.[3]

The ranks of the unemployed were daily being swelled. Although the size of the problem was less in Bristol than elsewhere, it was considerable by any standards. The Local Unemployment Index of the Ministry of Labour showed a local unemployment rate among adult male workers of some 15% to 18% in 1930, rising to 23% in December 1931, and reaching a peak of 24.5% in March 1932. This represented a total of about 31,000 unemployed. During 1932, 1933 and 1934 the rate was consistently above 20%, and did not fall below that figure until the second half of 1934.[4] Unemployment among women workers was normally about half the level of that for males, reaching a peak of 16.3% in March 1931. Rising unemployment was accompanied by cutbacks in the provision for the unemployed. The economy cuts imposed by the National Government led to corresponding reductions in local spending. In December 1931 the Council abandoned plans for some relief schemes,[5] and in January 1932 the P.A.C. announced that its relief scales would be reduced from March 31st.[6] The imposition of

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1. W.D.P., 2 October 1931, 12 October 1931.
2. W.D.P., 14 October 1931.
3. W.D.P., 31 October 1931.
4. Ministry of Labour, Local Unemployment Index.
5. B.T.M., 9 December 1931.
6. W.D.P., 30 January 1932.

a Means Test added to the difficulties faced by the unemployed, and the unemployed movement returned to the streets in the most sustained campaign of marches and demonstrations ever seen in Bristol.

The B.U.A. attempted to persuade the P.A.C. to change its mind about the cuts through a deputation, but was rebuffed. But the real leadership in the campaign against the cuts was provided by the N.U.W.M. In February it organised a march of 2000 unemployed to the Council.[1] Two weeks later nearly 3000 marchers clashed with police in the streets, but the disorder persuaded the P.A.C. to recommend a postponement of the cuts.[2] Deputations of both unemployed organisations were sent to the Council meeting on 8th March, when a Labour proposal to delay the cuts was discussed.[3] The motion was lost, but later in the month the P.A.C. agreed to delay the operation of the cuts for three months.[4]

A new phase of demonstrations began in May. On 27th May the P.A.C. was again put under pressure to delay the operation of the reductions in benefit.[5] On 9th June a large body of unemployed workers was broken up by police ambush, and the allegation that the trouble had been provoked by the police was taken up by the Labour group on the Council.[6] Three Communist leaders of the N.U.W.M. were imprisoned on charges of incitement after this incident. Protest meetings were called by the N.U.W.M., and the Labour group forced an emergency debate of the City Council to consider whether to set up an inquiry into the conduct of the police; but an amended motion expressing confidence in the police was passed.[7] The attacks on the unemployed, and the threat of further street disturbances, persuaded the Labour Party to attempt to involve

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1. W.D.P., 10 February 1932.
2. W.D.P., 24 February 1932.
3. W.D.P., 9 March 1932.
4. W.D.P., 19 March 1932.
5. B.E.P., 27 May 1932.
6. W.D.P., 10 June 1932; B.E.P., ibid.
7. W.D.P., 29 June 1932.

itself much more in the struggles of the unemployed. This was an urgent necessity for the Labour movement, in view of the ground made by the C.P. in the unemployed agitation. Some 10,000 joined a march on 5th July, organised by the N.U.W.M., [1] to protest at the imprisonment of the three leaders, and another 3000 marched to Horfield jail later in the month. [2] Moreover, there were signs of some trades union support for the N.U.W.M. The A.U.B.T.W. decided to call out its members on strike on 5th July, the day of the N.U.W.M. demonstration, in protest against official policy towards the unemployed. [3] To call a protest strike at such a time was unrealistic, but it does indicate a measure of support for the N.U.W.M. in sections of the trades union movement.

At the end of July the P.A.C. decided to reduce benefit once again, and the Labour members of the Committee walked out in protest, and refused in future to sit at relief tables to administer benefit. [4] Such a response was a far cry from the tactics employed before 1931. On 23rd August the City Council was to discuss a Labour Party motion to rescind the P.A.C. decision on reduced benefits. Outside, a mass demonstration was organised by the N.U.W.M., although Alderman Hennessy and Councillors Rogers and Cox joined the demonstration, and when a deputation was refused a hearing by the Council, smuggled a group of unemployed into the Council chamber. The meeting broke up in chaos, with the Labour members as angered by the incident as were their opponents. [5] On 6th September the Labour group successfully forced a special Council meeting to consider their proposal to speed up the proposed relief schemes. [6] On

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1. W.D.P., 6 July 1932.
2. W.D.P., 25 July 1932.
3. B.E.P., 1 July 1932.
4. W.D.P., 30 July 1932.
5. W.D.P., 24 August 1932.
6. W.D.P., 7 September 1932.

this point they were able to win some concessions. In other ways, too, the Labour movement was forced to relax its aloofness towards the struggle of the unemployed. On 11th September the B.L.P. and Trades Council, together with the local unions and the Co-operative movement, the I.L.P., the B.U.A. and the N.U.W.M., organised a joint demonstration to protest against the relief cuts.[1] Marches from the five parliamentary divisions converged in Queen's Square, where the speakers included Cripps, Hennessy, Sennington, Berriman, Rogers, Cox, and Linton of the B.U.A. The N.U.W.M. had no platform speakers, and N.U.W.M. members in the crowd howled down Labour speakers. As a demonstration of unity the affair was a fiasco, and henceforth the fragile co-operation between the N.U.W.M. and the B.U.A., which had flourished briefly in September 1932, disappeared.

The C.P., through the N.U.W.M., and work in such fields as the Railway Vigilance movement, was beginning to gain in strength on the Labour Party's left flank. There were also a number of C.P. front organisations through which the party propagated its ideas, such as the Friends of the Soviet Union and the International Labour Defence Organisation. But during the early 1930s the C.P.G.B. was going through its most sectarian phase, when it labelled all social democrats as 'social-fascists', and therefore the main enemy of the working class, who were to be attacked at every opportunity.[2] Thus the C.P. began to challenge Labour candidates at elections. In 1932, 1933 and 1934 the Communists put up candidates for the Municipal elections in St. Paul's and St. Philip and Jacob South wards, concentrating on the issues of unemployment, and the failure of the Labour Party and the I.L.P.

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1. W.D.P., 12 September 1932; B.E.P., ibid.
2. J. T. Murphy, Preparing for Power, (1972 ed.), pp.252-4.

to provide the necessary militant leadership.[1] But C.P. candidates made no impression on the Labour majorities in these wards. Whilst their leadership might be accepted in demonstrations, they could not break the majority of working class voters from their allegiance to the Labour Party.

The I.L.P. was caught in the middle of this split. Having disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932, it was no longer bound by party discipline, and could take an independent line in the unemployed movement. Berriman retained his council seat, but with the acquiescence of the Labour Party, and he remained as secretary of the B.U.A.; the I.L.P. was by no means a negligible force after disaffiliation. At first it was regarded by the C.P. as cast in the same mould as the Labour Party, and therefore a suitable target for attack. Paxton's campaign in St. Philip's in 1932 was aimed primarily against the sitting I.L.P. member, G. Daniels. In 1932 the I.L.P. attempted to establish a national rival to the N.U.W.M., when, in February, a national conference of Unemployed Associations was held in the Kingsley Hall.[2] The initial aim of the National Federation of the Employed and Unemployed was to gain recognition from the T.U.C. as a trades union. Its headquarters were at the Kingsley Hall, and all the major offices were filled by Bristolians.

The National Federation never effectively challenged the N.U.W.M., and in 1933, as the I.L.P. and C.P. began to entertain ideas of a united front, the I.L.P. Annual Conference advised local branches to support the N.U.W.M.[3] In July a joint meeting of the I.L.P. and N.U.W.M. was held

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1. W.D.P., 2 November 1932, 1933 and 1934; W. Paxton was the candidate in St. Philip and Jacob South on all three occasions. His highest vote was 234 in 1933.
2. W.D.P., 15 February 1932; I.L.P., Mins., September 1931.
3. I.L.P., Mins., July 1933.

in Bristol to discuss co-operation. Berriman agreed to use his position on the Council to help the N.U.W.M. present petitions and get a hearing for their deputations.[1] Thus some co-operation was achieved, although very limited, for the I.L.P. locally was committed to the B.U.A. and the National Federation, and was not prepared to sink all its energies on the unemployed struggle into the C.P. dominated N.U.W.M.

Nevertheless, co-operation between the B.U.A. and N.U.W.M. was established in 1933 through the mediation of the I.L.P. In 1933 also, the link between the B.U.A. and the Trades Council was re-established. The main issue on which the unemployed were fighting was that of test work. On 31st July the Trades Council convened a meeting of 250 men who had been ordered to do test work, and it was agreed to refuse to carry out the order.[2] A strike committee was established, with the President and Secretary of the Trades Council as members, and a deputation managed to persuade the P.A.C. that the regulation requiring applicants to perform test work was unworkable, and that the Committee should make representations to the Ministry to get the order revoked.[3] By the end of August, 700 test workers were on strike. But tensions between the unemployed and the Trades Council were beginning to appear. In September, following a decision by the strikers to send a deputation to the T.U.C. to demand more positive support for their fight, the Trades Council members withdrew from the strike committee, and left the strikers to their fate.[4] There was no further help from the Labour movement, and the strike collapsed.

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1. W.D.P., 12 April 1933; Berriman moved that Council should receive a N.U.W.M. deputation.
2. W.D.P., 1 August 1933.
3. W.D.P., 5 August 1933.
4. W.D.P., 4 September 1932.

What of the Labour Party during these struggles? Apart from the action of Hennessy, Rogers and Cox in 1932, neither the Labour group, nor the C.L.P.s were involved actively in the struggles of the unemployed. The majority of the Labour group treated the street demonstrations with disdain, and even when the East C.L.P. organised a demonstration in March 1932 against the action of the police, there were complaints about the non-attendance of prominent members of the party.[1] The Council Chamber and the Committee room were the ground on which the Labour Party chose to fight the battles of the unemployed locally; yet such an orientation effectively excluded the unemployed themselves from active participation. But the pressure of the unemployed had its effect on the Labour Party; during 1932 and 1933 Labour councillors were unusually active in pressing the claims of the unemployed, and unusually militant in doing so.[2] On a number of occasions Labour members, whose behaviour in the Council chamber was normally scrupulously correct, disrupted the proceedings when the Citizen majority attempted to block discussion of questions relating to the unemployed.[3] Moreover, the pressure from the street outside was an invaluable lever not only in the attempt to get the issue discussed, but also in winning concessions. But the Labour group was only able to use this lever insofar as they could distance themselves from the demonstrators, whilst identifying with their cause. Only as mediators could they, at one and the same time, act as both spokesmen for the unemployed and as the upholders of law and order.

The same was true of the M.P.s. During the 1931 election campaign Cripps was approached by the N.U.W.M. to oppose cuts in benefits and

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., March 1932.
2. In June and September, the Labour group forced special Council meetings to debate issues relating to the unemployed.
3. W.D.P., 15 June 1932; B.E.P., 14 June 1932.

to lead a demonstration. He agreed to the former, but not the latter.[1] Later, in the Commons in October 1932, he stated his attitude clearly:

'Many members of the Labour Party have been doing their utmost to keep the unemployed away from the influence of the Communists. It is a tremendous task. What are we to say to the unemployed of Bristol who point to what has happened at Birkenhead and Belfast, when we try to persuade them that they will get nothing by rioting, and that they can only achieve their end by constitutional means. ...'

'Only a few weeks ago I was asked by the unemployed of Bristol to lead a deputation, and I refused because I was not going to associate myself with the rioting which I knew would probably result.'[2]

He ended with a plea for concessions to be made by the Government on the means test, as a demonstration of the gains that can be made through parliamentary action.

There were other dilemmas associated with the Labour strategy. Labour councillors, who were in a minority, found themselves having to administer unpopular measures. Labour members of the P.A.C., in particular, were faced with the question of whether to administer the Means Test, which they found objectionable. The B.L.P. debated this question in April 1932;[3] those councillors who served on the Committee voted 19 to 7 to remain, in accordance with official Labour Party policy. The majority of the B.L.P. favoured the retention of Labour representatives on the means test committee. But the East C.L.P. rejected this line and instructed its representatives to withdraw. They should not,

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1. N.U.W.M. to Cripps, 17 October 1931; Cripps to N.U.W.M., 19 October 1931, (Cripps papers).
2. W.D.P., 20 October 1932.
3. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 11 May 1932.

Hennessy argued, be parties to 'such a disgraceful piece of legislation.'[1] Against him was offered the argument that they could best protect applicants if they were on the Committee, and that they should be loyal to party decisions. But even a B.L.P. intervention failed to make the East C.L.P. change its mind,[2] and eventually, in July 1932, it was the B.L.P. which changed its policy, and decided to withdraw Labour representatives from the committee administering the means test.[3] Neither solution was a satisfactory answer to the means test, but the final decision of the B.L.P. represented one of the few possible means of protest open to the Labour Party through the constitutional framework. The Labour Party had thus been pushed some considerable way from its policy of complete collaboration, under the pressure of events and manifestations of working class militancy.

The B.U.A., too, was transformed by the attacks on the unemployed and the growing militancy of the unemployed themselves. The Children's summer outing was still an annual event, but the B.U.A. placed less emphasis on its welfare role as it attempted to compete with the N.U.W.M. as the spokesman of the unemployed. The church connection was severed, and the churches in the 1930s directed most of their energies to providing a welfare service into the Unemployed Welfare Association founded in October 1932, which aroused considerable suspicion within the Labour movement.[4] The B.U.A. tended, after 1932, to drift towards closer co-operation with the N.U.W.M. Thus in February 1934 a Bristol United Front Hunger Marchers' Reception Committee was formed by the N.U.W.M. and B.U.A., together with the I.L.P. and the University Union

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 25 May 1932.
2. ibid., 22 June 1932.
3. ibid., 13 July 1932.
4. W.D.P., 1 April 1935.

to cater for the South Wales marchers en route to London.[1] After this ad hoc co-operation, the two bodies collaborated more regularly in sending joint deputations to the Council,[2] and laid the basis for a more solid united effort against the implementation of Part II of the Unemployment Insurance Act, with its provision for compulsory training centres.[3] The N.U.W.M. declared 24th February 1935 as a day of national protest against the measure and all the resources of the two bodies were poured into a local united front committee to organise a demonstration.[4]

The B.L.P. was invited to participate, but refused.[5] Instead the Trades Council and B.L.P. organised their own campaign, and on the day of national protest, held a conference of Labour, trades union and co-operative organisations to protest against the Act and to demand the abolition of the means test. The I.L.P. was present at the meeting, and proposed a united front to conduct the campaign. But years of accumulated distrust and suspicion, and the memory of Queen's Square in 1932, led the Labour Party to reject the idea outright.[6] Yet there were signs that the Labour Party too was becoming less implacably opposed to some kind of limited co-operation even with the N.U.W.M. In September 1936 a march of the South Wales unemployed to London passed through Bristol; on previous occasions the local labour leadership had treated the marchers with indifference, but this time they were not snubbed although the march had again been declared unofficial by the T.U.C., and local Labour Party and trades union organisations had been instructed to have nothing to do with it. The Trades Council set up a

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1. W.D.P., 12 February 1934.
2. W.D.P., 28 March 1934.
3. B. Gilbert, op.cit., Ch. 5.
4. Hannington, op.cit., p.321; B.E.P., 22 February 1935.
5. B.E.P., 1 February 1935.
6. W.D.P., 25 February 1935; B.E.P., 24 February 1935.

reception committee to arrange accommodation for the marchers.[1] The Labour Party was also involved; a large body of marchers were accommodated by the East C.L.P. at their headquarters, and help was offered by other C.L.P.s.[2] At least at some levels of the movement there was a growing feeling of the need for unity, and for the Labour Party to be seen to be involved in the actual struggles of workers.

It was, perhaps, ironic that the official institutions of the Labour movement should begin to involve themselves more in the struggles of the unemployed when the problem of unemployment was itself beginning to recede. By the end of 1936 the percentage of the working population who were unemployed in Bristol had fallen to 11.2%, and continued to decline. During the early years of mass unemployment, when the unemployed were demonstrating in the streets, neither the majority of Labour councillors, nor trades union officials, nor indeed a large part of the rank and file of the movement had done much to dispel the impression held by the unemployed that the Labour movement represented primarily the interests of employed workers. For the most part the field was left free for the Communist Party to intervene in the unemployed struggles, and thereby hoist itself into a position where its presence could no longer be ignored by the Labour Party or trades union leaderships. The growth of this militant force on Labour's left flank, at a time of heightening crisis as a result of the situation in Europe, contributed to the growing tensions within the Labour Party between its left wing and the parliamentary and trades union leadership. These tensions and conflicts will be the theme of the next chapter.

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1. B.E.P., 18 September 1936.
2. Bristol South C.L.P., G.C. Mins., September 1936.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Labour Movement, 1935-1939

In November 1935 the Labour Party fought the last General Election before the outbreak of war. The movement was entering a period when it would be faced with unprecedented opportunities, and enormous dangers, and when its responses, as the major radical force in politics, would be a crucial contributory factor to the way in which events unfolded. The results of the Election showed that Labour had climbed out of the trough into which it had sunk in 1931 and had re-established itself, through its ability to attract working class votes, as a party contending for office. In Bristol, Labour won the South, and retained the East constituencies. Only in the Central Division, however, did it come near to winning another seat, whilst Ayles in Bristol North was decisively beaten.[1] The results were, therefore, somewhat mixed. Walkden (South) was let in by the split in the opposition vote, caused by a Liberal intervention. Elsewhere, there were straight fights between Labour and National candidates. In each constituency, Labour increased its share of the vote over the 1931 figures, but only in Bristol Central was there an increase over the 1929 vote - although this did not result in the winning of the seat.[2]

Labour went into the election armed with its fairly radical programme, 'For Socialism and Peace'. Candidates were no longer shy of mentioning nationalisation; but the main issues on which they based their campaign were unemployment and the impositions of the National

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1. Following this defeat, Ayles' long association with Bristol was ended. In 1936 the North C.L.P. decided to replace Ayles as its candidate, and chose instead W. Coldrick, local N.C.L.C. organiser, who was sponsored by the Co-operative Party. (Bristol North C.L.P., Mins., 1936, passim).
2. F. S. Craig, op.cit., See Appendix I, p. 392.

Government, especially the Means Test. In Bristol Central in particular, Taylor, a T.G.W.U. nominee, concentrated on the Government's record on unemployment. He was glad, he said, that 'the Labour Party had not allowed the issue at the election to be obscured by the cry of armaments, and had brought it down to the question of unemployment and home conditions.'[1] Cripps, too, dismissed foreign affairs as a side issue. Yet unemployment was already on the decline, and although it still warranted first place as an issue on which to attack the National Government, Labour could not ignore the question of war or peace on which their opponents concentrated. Cripps, indeed, raised the slogan, 'Vote for Cripps and No More War',[2] and one of his election leaflets showed a photograph of him with Lansbury above the caption, 'The Apostles of Peace'.[3] It was this issue which came to dominate not only national politics, but also local, and the conflicts that were beginning to emerge within the Labour movement in the years between 1939 and the outbreak of war.

As with the struggle against unemployment, so too in the fight against war, the Labour movement had not come forward with a policy or a programme of action that derived from an independent working class position. The I.L.P.'s Christian Pacifism of the First World War period dominated the thinking of much of the Labour movement on the subject in the inter-war period. The only real alternative policy offered was that of the more conservative elements, perhaps best personified locally by Walkden, who supported the empire, accepted the need to defend it, and was prepared to agree to rearmament as a means to this end.[4]

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1. B.E.P., 11 November 1935.
2. Bristol East C.L.P., 1935 General Election address.
3. ibid.
4. W.D.P., 5 November 1935.

During the 1920s the local movement had been closely linked with the pacifist No-More War Movement (N.-M.W.M.). Starting in 1922, annual demonstrations were held by the N.-M.W.M., which locally consisted of an alliance of the Quakers, the I.L.P., the Women's International League, the League of Nations Union, the Co-operative movement, the Adult Schools, the Free Churches, the Trades and Labour Council, the Women's Liberal Federation and the Women's Unionist Association.[1] Ayles was prominent nationally in the N.-M.W.M., at one time serving as Organising Secretary.[2] The Labour movement took the lead in promoting this alliance, but did not attempt to dominate its politics. Indeed, such an amalgam of widely differing political and non-political forces could only be sustained insofar as it subscribed to the assumption that war and peace was not a matter for party politics.

During the 1930s the collaborative approach to the peace movement continued to dominate Labour thinking. The Peace Ballot of 1934, for example, was arranged in Bristol by a broadly-based committee which included the Labour Alderman, Sennington.[3] During 1935, as the victories of fascism and the beginnings of rearmament brought the threat of a new world war ever closer, the peace movement took on a new significance. It was the Labour movement which took the lead in convening a peace demonstration in April which brought together not only the Divisional Labour Parties, the Trades Council, the Co-op, and six trades unions, including the T.G.W.U. and A.E.U., but also a variety of Christian,

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1. W.D.P., 31 July 1922, 23 July 1923.
2. Labour Who's Who, 1927.
3. B.E.P., 10 November 1934; the ballot was organised by the League of Nations Union, and the committee included a Mr. H. G. Tanner as Chairman, Mr. H. W. Jenkins as Treasurer and Mr. E. J. Lovell as organiser. Apart from Sennington's involvement, there does not appear to have been any further involvement in the committee or ballot by the Labour Party, although both the Frome and Thornbury C.L.P.s, in divisions which bordered on Bristol, announced their support for the aims of the ballot.
(W.D.P., 13 November, 17 November 1934.)

educational and social bodies, the Bristol Council for the Defence of Civil Liberties and the University Union.[1] In all, some forty organisations were represented on the platform. The joint secretaries of the demonstration were Cox and Parker, and the Chief Marshal was Hennessy.[2] The Western Counties Liberal Federation urged its members to support the meeting. The aim, said Cox, was to 'make the demonstration as representative as possible on non-party lines without any political party dominating it.'[3] Thus although the Labour movement had taken the initiative in bringing about this broadly-based movement, it did not attempt to provide it with socialist leadership; rather, the Labour movement spokesmen who played a leading part in the peace agitation shared the predominantly pacifist assumptions of the Christian and other bodies represented at the meeting, and therefore allowed the meeting to content itself with passing vague resolutions calling for disarmament and arbitration in international disputes.

During June and July 1935 moves were made to link all these organisations and more into a permanent Bristol Peace Council.[4] In all, some 146 organisations were represented on the Council, which was to be controlled by a committee including Labour Party members, Berriman of the I.L.P., a representative of the local Liberals, and leading Nonconformist clergy.[5] The Citizen party complained that the Council was dominated by the Labour Party, and undoubtedly the party had succeeded in bringing together a remarkable collection of organisations, united in a common desire for peace.[6] It is thus surprising that Labour candidates

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1. B.E.P., 12 April 1935.
2. B.E.P., 8 April 1935.
3. W.D.P., 2 April 1935.
4. I.L.P., Mins., 1935, passim.
5. W.D.P., 4 June 1935; These organisations included the League of Nations Union, the Salvation Army, The Methodist Peace Fellowship, the Society of Friends, the Bristol Council for the Defence of Civil Liberties, the Adult Schools, Anglican and Nonconformist Churches, Trade Unions, C.L.P.s, the Trades and Labour Council, Liberal parties and the Co-operative movement.
6. W.D.P., 11 September 1935.

in the General Election later in the year did not seek to capitalise on these efforts and to channel the widespread support for the peace movement into a Labour vote.

Part of the explanation was that the Labour Party as a whole, and particularly its parliamentary leadership, could offer no clear alternative to the National Government's policies. Nor was there any coherence within the left-wing of the movement on the question of how to respond to the growing threat of war. There was widespread opposition to the National Government's policy of appeasement of the dictators. But in the pacifist mind, support for sanctions against Italy, for example, was tantamount to support for war; whilst even the non-pacifist elements could foresee dangers in such a policy as long as the National Government was still at the helm. In the era of the dictators, more than at any other time, pacifism could not provide the Labour movement with an adequate theoretical base from which to develop alternative policies. Yet it was to the traditions of the Conscientious Objectors of the previous war that most of the left continued to look for guidance. This was as much true of the Socialist League within the Labour party, as it was of the I.L.P. outside. Habgood was very much in the same tradition as Ayles or Berriman.

Thus the I.L.P., which was at this time advocating a United Front of working class organisations to meet the threat of fascism and war, was also instrumental in sponsoring the Bristol Peace Council, a broadly based coalition which could only survive by avoiding consideration of the political nature of these questions, and appealing instead to a vaguer, humanistic desire for peace. It is significant that the Socialist League affiliated to the Peace Council in 1935. Cripps, its leading spokesman, was by this stage advocating socialist change as the only alternative to fascism and war, but he had not yet adopted, as the

corollary of this position, the idea of the united front. The divisions between left and right within the movement around the issues of war and fascism had not, in 1935, crystallised to the extent of later years. The lines of division were still blurred by the continuing strength of pacifism, and by the fact that I.L.P. and Socialist League could be linked, through the Peace Council, to trades unions such as the T.G.W.U., which had been instrumental at Labour Party conferences in the party's repudiation of Lansbury's pacifism, and also to essentially bourgeois pacifist bodies.

Not all the C.L.P.s, however, affiliated to the Council. The West C.L.P. declined to affiliate,[1] whilst the East C.L.P. refused after attempting, without success, to win it over to a more socialist policy.[2] Most of the ward parties in the East also declined to join; the St. George West Women's Section, for example, decided that 'no useful purpose would be served by joining the Peace Council, as the members could be better employed in working for socialism.'[3] Signs of a more independent policy were, therefore, beginning to emerge, although the East C.L.P. was isolated not only within the Peace Council, but also within the Labour movement, and the lines of future internal conflict were beginning to be drawn. Before analysing the way in which these conflicts developed however, it is necessary to look at developments within the movement locally.

In 1936, after years of negotiations, ward boundaries were redrawn, and the number of wards, each of roughly 8000 voters, was increased from

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1. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., July 1935; April 1936.
2. B.L.P., 16 July 1935; The East C.L.P.'s delegate moved an amendment to the main resolution that the Peace Council should educate the public in the economic conditions which cause war, and promote an opinion in favour of the acceptance of the principles of the League of Nations, and for the International control of raw materials. This was lost. The majority 'did not want to stress any one side, but to link up the various opinions.'
3. St. George West Ward Labour Party, Women's Section Mins., July 1935.

23 to 28. This involved the Labour Party in a reorganisation of its own ward structure. In most cases, this could be achieved relatively painlessly since some form of Labour Party organisation existed in most parts of the City, and even on the new estates, small groups of supporters, and of women, had been established well in advance of the boundary changes. In the Hillfields part of the Stapleton Ward, for example, a women's section had been in existence since 1927; a separate group for the whole membership in the area was not set up, however, until ward reorganisation was imminent. In February 1936 a meeting of the Labour Party members in the area established the Hillfields group, which in June reconstituted itself as a new Ward party.[1] Similar steps were being taken in all the new wards.

The Labour Party gained considerably from the boundary changes. Of the 28 wards, only 12 could be regarded as unassailable Citizen strongholds, whereas Labour quickly gained a monopoly of seats in 15, with the representation shared in the other, St. Augustine.[2] The work put in by Labour Party members on the new housing estates being built on the fringes of the City had thus come to fruition, for Labour councillors were returned for Avon, Brislington, Hengrove, Hillfields, Horfield, and Somerset. In all, in 1936, Labour gained 16 seats and the Citizens one, bringing the total Labour strength to 46 councillors and five Aldermen.[3] After taking the next five vacancies on the Aldermanic bench Labour's strength in the Council was exactly equal to that of the Citizens.[4] A further two seats gained in 1937 gave it a small majority for the first time ever. As soon as the new Council met after the elections Labour took control over all Council Committees, and prepared to put its policies into effect.

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1. Hillfields Ward Labour Party, Mins., June 1936.
2. W.D.P., 2 November 1936.
3. W.D.P., 2 November 1936.
4. W.D.P., 21 November 1936.

These policies had changed very little in essence over the past twenty years - a testimony to the years of delay in implementing much-needed reforms. While it is true that some 15,000 Council houses, for example, were built in the inter-war period, this in no way matched up to requirements, and in the late-1930s there were still extensive areas of slums and overcrowded housing, particularly in the central areas.[1] A survey carried out by the University of Bristol Social Survey in 1937 showed that, although 'The Bristol working classes are on the whole distinctly better off than those of London, and probably of other towns,' there was nevertheless, considerable evidence of poverty. Some 10.7% of families endured a standard of living which was below the poverty line, and this was at a time of relative boom, associated with rearmament and the growth of the aircraft industry. The survey found that the major causes of poverty were unemployment - this affected one third of the families in poverty - insufficient wages, old age, and the absence of an adult male wage earner. Of working class families, 4% were said to be in utter destitution.[2]

Labour Councillors, therefore, addressed themselves to the problems of housing, health, public works, public assistance, municipal trading, and education, in much the same way as they had in the past. The Labour Party's 1937 Municipal programme differed from earlier programmes in that it was more specific about what Labour would do. It also differed in that it was notably less radical. On housing, for example, it replaced the traditional Labour policy of commitment to direct labour with the offer to 'investigate the possibility' of such a scheme. On municipal trading, it was also noticeably vague. As the Labour Party

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1. H. Tout, The Standard of Living in Bristol, (Bristol 1937).
2. ibid.

approached a majority on the Council the main thrust of the Citizen attack was no longer the charge of unconstitutionalism, but that of high rates which would be necessitated by increased public spending, and it was the rates bogey which tended to dominate the thinking of Labour candidates. Direct labour schemes and municipal trading could be very expensive additions to the rates burden. The programme thus stated that the Labour Party was aware of the hardships caused by increased rates, but pointed out that 'Our programme is designed as one to be undertaken in stages, with a careful consideration of the expenditure involved at every step.'[1] Moderation and careful financial management were to be the Labour Council's watchwords.

At a victory celebration held in Bristol after the 1937 election, Herbert Morrison, the principal guest speaker, emphasised the need for moderation. 'When a municipal Labour Party comes to power', he said, 'it must remember that it has become responsible for the local government of the whole city. It is, in a sense, responsible to all the citizens, not excluding the citizens who voted against its candidates in the election, and that its administration must at all times be animated by a desire to serve the general public interest.'[2] Frank Sheppard, still Labour leader on the Council, had earlier made it clear that this was precisely what the new council would attempt to do. This was Labour's chance to prove its fitness to govern, and, said Sheppard, 'It will be our duty to see that this position is not abused, and that we prove ourselves competent to manage the affairs of the city as well as any other party.'[3] Much-needed reforms had therefore to be postponed, more especially since increased expenditure on A.R.P. precautions during the year caused an

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1. B.E.P., 4 October 1937.
2. W.D.P., 22 November 1937.
3. B.E.P., 5 November 1937, quote from B.L.W.

increase in rates, and any additional expenditure would have served to exacerbate the problem. In 1938, then, the Labour programme could point to but few minor achievements. On housing, no more had been achieved than under their Citizen predecessors; on public works, a start had been made on a major main drainage scheme, but other schemes, such as roads, had not been started. In some minor, but nevertheless important ways, the Labour Council had effected improvements. The salaries of nurses, for example, were raised, and the system of feeding 'necessitous children' had been overhauled and improved, but taken as a whole the achievements were small. Poverty and housing remained pressing social problems requiring urgent attention, yet little had been initiated in these areas.[1]

The retreat from the albeit modest programme of earlier years had been evident even before Labour achieved a majority. One of the cardinal features of Labour Party policy since before 1914 had been a commitment to municipal control over the tramways. The option for the Corporation to take over control could be taken up at seven year intervals, and in 1936 a further chance presented itself. On every previous occasion the Citizen or Tory/Liberal majority had declined to exercise the option, but a number of changes in the circumstances surrounding the issue had occurred. The Tramways Company had effectively fallen under the control of the national combine, Tillings, who preferred a change-over from trams to motor buses. Whilst the tram services had been under private enterprise, however, bus services within the city had been under the control of the Corporation. The Tramways option committee, therefore, whose chairman was F. Sheppard, although it had a Citizen majority, was less predisposed to reject outright the notion of municipal involvement in the running of bus services. It was not, however, prepared to recommend outright

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1. Bristol B.L.P., Put Bristol in Front, Municipal Election programme, 1938.

municipal control. The report, to which Sheppard subscribed, advocated the coordination of the tramways with the city omnibus services, with the Corporation and the Company as joint owners. The existing tramways system was to be abandoned within two years and replaced by buses.[1]

A Council meeting in July 1936 voted 44 to 17 in favour of the scheme.[2] The Labour members were split on the issue. A Labour amendment that steps be taken to promote a parliamentary bill to acquire the whole of the tramways was defeated, with several Labour councillors voting against. It was notably the more left-wing councillors who opposed the scheme, regarding it as a betrayal of socialist principles. Against them were ranged the older Labour Aldermen and Councillors, such as Sheppard, who regarded the scheme as the best bargain they could make in the circumstances. The B.L.P. and Trades Council came down in favour of the plan, and Parker was one of its most consistent advocates. Of particular interest, however, was the attitude of the T.G.W.U., especially the Regional Secretary Donovan. The old tramways undertaking had been a notoriously anti-union company, and trades union organisation had been completely destroyed in 1923. The Tillings takeover altered the situation. In the mid-1930s the union began to rebuild its organisation in the bus and tram depots, and to open discussions with the company on a recognition and procedure agreement. The projected changeover from trams to buses constituted a major change in working conditions, and created a situation in which the union's services were urgently required. Membership increased and the company proved amenable to negotiations with the T.G.W.U. In July 1936, at the same time as the Tramways Option Committee was presenting its report, a preliminary procedural agreement was signed.[3]

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1. W.D.P., 16 July 1936; B.E.P., ibid.
2. W.D.P., 22 July 1936.
3. B.E.P., 18 July 1936.

The union's attitude was an important factor in determining the policy of the Labour movement to the scheme. Donovan was elected to the City Council in November 1936, and there were other T.G.W.U. councillors.[1] Moreover, the T.G.W.U. exercised a considerable influence in the B.L.P. and the Trades Council by virtue of its size as the largest local union. In this instance, Donovan showed clearly that he was prepared to put expediency before any attachment to socialist principles. He argued that the union, having reached agreement with the company, safeguarding the future employment prospects of the members, had no objection to the proposed scheme.[2] Indeed, Donovan became one of its main protagonists, speaking for it not only in the Council Chamber, but also at a special Town meeting called to discuss the Corporation's proposal to promote a parliamentary bill.[3] At this meeting the splits within the Labour Party were exposed to public view. Ranged against Donovan - who has been accused of packing the meeting with T.G.W.U. members to swing the vote - were the leading lights of the local Labour left, such as Rogers and St. John Reade.[4] The final agreement between the company and the union had only been completed some two weeks before this meeting, and it seems likely that these negotiations were at least eased by the company's desire to keep the union on its side during the time when the reorganisation was taking place.[5] The Town Meeting voted in favour of the scheme and it was duly put into effect.

The tramways affair was significant in another context. It heralded the increasing intervention of the T.G.W.U. into the political affairs of

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1. e.g., Alderman A. W. A. Burgess, Councillor W. Merrick.
2. W.D.P., 22 July 1936.
3. W.D.P., 25 May 1937; B.E.P., ibid.
4. H. E. Rogers, Conversation with the author.
5. B.E.P., 11 May 1937; A final agreement covering wage increases, and guaranteeing security of employment.

the local Labour movement and the consequent conflict between it and the constituency-based Labour left. This mirrored the situation at national level where, after 1931, the unions, and the T.G.W.U. in particular, asserted their predominance within the Labour Party, and guided it in a more conservative direction. As leading members of the Bristol East C.L.P. began to move towards a more militantly socialist stance, together with their Socialist League allies in the West, they found Donovan to be one of their main local adversaries. They began to conflict also with the officers of the B.L.P., the Regional Officials of the Labour Party, and with the party Headquarters. There was a growing tendency in the later 1930s for the Labour Party Headquarters, through its regional officers, and for the B.L.P., to intervene in the C.L.P.s and wards to oversee their electoral organisation. One of the lessons that Transport House drew from Labour's showing at the 1935 General Election was that the party's electoral machinery in the divisions was in need of an overhaul. At the same time, as the boundary changes locally necessitated the formation of new ward parties, and as Labour approached the situation of being the majority party in the City Council, the B.L.P. began to take a more active interest in the election arrangements made by the ward parties, and in their selection of candidates. This was symptomatic of a growing concern among party officials, both local and national, not only with the efficiency of the party's local organisation, but also with their allegiance to party conference and N.E.C. decisions.

In June 1936 a local conference was arranged between the B.L.P., local C.L.P. representatives, and the party N.E.C., at the suggestion of the last, on the efficiency of general election machinery.[1] Very little

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., papers, Points for discussion between N.E.C. and B.L.P./C.L.P.s, 20 June 1936.

came out of the meeting. The proposals put forward by the N.E.C., of building efficient ward committees, of compiling records of supporters, training key workers for positions in the electoral machinery, and securing the services of competent persons to act as election agents, were already standard practice in the best organised local C.L.P.s, the East and the West. There was clearly room for improvement in the North C.L.P. which had never had a full-time agent, and whose electoral arrangements tended to be rather ad hoc, but no immediate changes were made. Nevertheless, the party officials kept in touch with the situation and regional organisational conferences were held with the C.L.P.s.

Locally, in the municipal elections, the B.L.P. was concerned that inefficient machinery, and the selection of inappropriate candidates, should not prevent Labour taking full advantage of the opportunities opened to it by the ward redistribution. In May 1936 it announced its plans for the next election. Questions of propaganda, finance, and the selection of suitable candidates - by which was meant those who had some knowledge of local government work, and platform ability - were to be overseen by an Election Committee consisting of the B.L.P. officers and one representative from each division.[1] There was some resistance within the C.L.P.s to the suggestion that selection of candidates should be vetted, but when the wards came to select them, representatives of the B.L.P. Election Committee attended the ward meetings and on occasions nominated those whom they considered to be the most suitable.[2] The rather loosely organized municipal panel of candidates which had operated for a number of years was thus transformed into a more meaningful check on the autonomy of the

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1. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., May 1936.
2. ibid., June 1936.

ward parties. The whole municipal election campaign was to be more centrally co-ordinated, with election literature issued by the B.L.P. as well as by the ward and C.L.P.s, a propaganda campaign during the summer months, leading to the election in November, and culminating in a Municipal rally, which could draw on the services of M.P.s such as Cripps.[1]

During the later 1930s, then, the Labour Party's electoral efforts became more efficient and more effective, and the party was able to take full advantage of the ward redistribution. Propaganda was regarded in a much more serious light, both by the B.L.P. and by the C.L.P.s. The desire for a more effective co-ordination of propaganda work led, in 1938, to the establishment of a Bristol and District Labour Propaganda Association, recognised by the N.E.C. as the body responsible for co-ordinating propaganda work in and around Bristol.[2] The Association was claimed to be the first of its kind set up anywhere in the country by the Labour Party, and consisted of individual members who were prepared to devote themselves to propaganda work. A Management Committee of 16 represented the B.L.P., the C.L.P.s, and the County Federations of Gloucester, Somerset and Wiltshire; Rees, the West C.L.P. agent, and Reade, also of the West C.L.P., were prominent in the Association's work. The party was thus beginning to get to grips with the fact that its propaganda needs could not be met simply by relying on the resources of ward and constituency parties.

The position of the wards and the C.L.P.s at the end of our period was mixed. No ward in the city was entirely without Labour Party organisation, although in well-to-do areas such as Clifton, Redland and Durdham, it was inevitably weak. In the Central division, too, despite

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1. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., July 1936.
2. W.D.P., 12 April 1938.

the areas of working class housing, the Labour Party remained a weak body, with membership at around 500 throughout the 1930s.[1] In the North, the picture was much the same, with membership fluctuating, but averaging about 600. The largest parties, then, were the South and the East C.L.P.s, each with membership fluctuating around the 1000 or above mark.[2] At ward level, the state of the party also varied. Those ward parties which had only recently been called into existence by the boundary changes experienced remarkable progress. Fired by enthusiasm at the chance of launching a new local party organisation, and with excellent prospects of electoral success, the members of the new ward parties were among the most active Labour Party members in the late 1930s. The minutes of the Hillfields ward party, for example, reveal a high level of activity and enthusiasm.[3] The Hengrove ward, formed in 1936, had built up a membership of 500 within its first year, and raised enough money to acquire a Labour hall for the ward.[4] In other areas, however, the picture was different. In the East, the absence of electoral contests in the two St. George wards led to a run down in party activity there, which was reflected in declining membership figures. From the peak of 2566 members in 1933, the party had declined to 1416 in 1939, although it remained the largest C.L.P. in Bristol. The problem was compounded by the lack of membership campaigns which had been annual events in the early 1930s. In a sense, the high level of membership of the early 1930s had been misleading, for the level of commitment of the majority to the party had not been high, and there had clearly been an enormous turnover in membership. Declining returns after 1933 in large

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1. Labour Party, Annual Reports, passim.
2. ibid.
3. Hillfields Ward Labour Party, Mins., passim.
4. W.D.P., 19 April 1937.

part, merely reflected the absence of organised recruiting drives. But this in itself was a reflection of a much deeper problem that afflicted the East C.L.P. in particular, which was that of membership apathy, and this would seem to have been as much a political problem as one that derived from lack of electoral activity.[1]

The 1938 Annual meeting of the East C.L.P. discussed the problem of declining membership and lack of interest in the party. Cripps, in contrast to Rogers, regarded it as mainly a political problem. 'We must become,' he said 'a much more militant and challenging body before we can get power in the country, and to achieve that we must have a wide publicity on the right lines.'[2] He also suggested a membership campaign. But propaganda and recruiting drives depended for their success on the willingness of the most committed and most active Labour Party members to participate, and it was among this group that the key to the situation was to be found. If the party's most active members felt themselves to be frustrated, or alienated from the party's policies, then the activity of the party as a whole was bound to suffer. In the Bristol East C.L.P. this frustration was clearly evident in the later 1930s.

Much of this frustration focused upon the P.L.P.'s seemingly ineffectual opposition to the Government policy of appeasement. There was a growing feeling among the ranks of ordinary Labour Party members, including many in Bristol, that the party leadership was not taking the fascist threat seriously and that the party was failing in its duty of putting forward a clearly defined, alternative foreign policy. Labour's

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1. Although Rogers regarded it as the latter. See H. E. Rogers to Cripps, 18 October 1937, in which he observed that 'much of the apathy is undoubtedly due to the fact that there has been no municipal contest in several of the wards for a number of years.' (Cripps papers).
2. Bristol East C.L.P., Annual Report, 1938. (Cripps papers).

foreign policy centred on its commitment to the League of Nations and the principles of collective security, and the party demanded that the Government should take firm action, together with the other democratic powers, to punish the aggressive acts of the dictators. The Labour Party, however, was opposed to rearmament, until 1937, since it distrusted the Government and feared the uses to which the increased armaments might be put. The Labour leadership also opposed appeasement, as practised by the Chamberlain government, but it was not opposed to the principle of conceding certain of the dictators' demands if a 'just' case could be made out for them. To many in the party, particularly those on the left, such a policy was an inadequate response to the unprecedented situation of the time, and successive party conferences in the mid-1930s witnessed a struggle between the left and the parliamentary and trades union leaderships over foreign policy. The left's fatal weakness, however, and the one that was ruthlessly exposed by Bevin, was its continuing attachment to pacifist ideas.

At a local level, as we have seen, the response of a large part of the Labour movement was a pacifist one. Within the East C.L.P., however, and to a certain extent in the West C.L.P., a desire for a more independent response to the problems of fascism and war were beginning to emerge, as reflected in the refusal of these parties to affiliate to the Peace Council. These rather vague feelings crystallised around the Socialist League's opposition to the official Labour Party foreign policy, and, in particular, around the person of Cripps and his campaigns for the United Front and later the Popular Front.[2] It seems clear that Cripps' personal position within the East C.L.P. was an important factor in swinging the majority

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1. For a useful discussion of the Labour Party's attitude to foreign policy and of the conflicts which split the party over this issue during the 1930s, see: J. F. Naylor, Labour's International Policy, (1969).
2. E. Estorick, op.cit., pp.150-3, 162ff.

of that party into opposition to the official Labour Party policy, but this alone is not an adequate explanation. Uneasiness about the National Government's policy and the Labour Party's ineffectual opposition to it, ran right through the Labour movement. In Bristol East this uneasiness resulted in very strong opposition partly because of Cripps' influence, but also because party activists there considered themselves, as the builders of one of the party's model divisions, to be the backbone of the party, and that their views ought to count as much, if not more, than those of the trades unions, who exercised a conservative influence on party policy through the use of the block vote at Conference. The Socialist League offered them the possibility of presenting a challenge to the ineffectual policies of the P.L.P., by mobilising rank and file party members around a common platform.

The United Front campaign was launched by the Socialist League, the I.L.P. and the C.P., in January 1937.[1] For some time previously, the desire for unity within the Labour movement had been developing. Much of the early initiative had come from the C.P., which in 1932 issued a call for unity in action.[2] At first, the Communists could find few takers for their offer - the memory of bitter sectarian attacks was too recent. Moreover, the C.P. continued to oppose Labour candidates at municipal elections until 1934. In the unemployed struggle, however, as we have seen, a tentative United Front was established between the B.U.A. and the C.P.-led N.U.W.M. These moves towards accommodation between the two unemployed organisations were fostered by the I.L.P. and the C.P., which despite their considerable differences in method and policy, and continuing friction between them, began to explore the possibilities of joint political work. In March 1933 the I.L.P. branch received a letter from head office

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1. R. Miliband, op.cit., p.245.
2. A. Hutt, op.cit., p.242.

urging 'a united effort of Socialist organisations to combat the evils of fascism and war'.[1] Some limited co-operation resulted. In November the branch replied to an enquiry from head office that they had co-operated on the fight against fascism, on May-Day, against test and task work, and in local anti-war demonstrations, but that they had received no support from the local Labour Parties.[2] Due to attacks on I.L.P. leaders in the Daily Worker, however, the Bristol I.L.P. was distinctly lukewarm to the United Front idea, and wished to limit themselves to co-operation on specific issues as they arose.[3] During 1934, therefore, very little was done to consolidate unity, and the idea was not revived until 1935.

These early attempts to build 'a united front from below' had passed by the local C.L.P.s. Moves by the N.U.W.M. for joint action in the 1935 unemployed campaign had been rebuffed by the B.L.P., and the Trades Council and B.L.P. had decided to organise an independent campaign. The I.L.P., however, represented something of a bridge. The secretary, Berriman, retained his Council seat with Labour Party approval, was invited to Labour group meetings, and thus had the ear of the Labour Group. The B.L.P. and C.L.P.s showed themselves willing to co-operate with the I.L.P. and other bodies in the Peace Council. Through its connection with the Peace Council the I.L.P. showed that its sympathies were still overwhelmingly pacifist, and that it fitted much more easily into a broad front coalition of pacifist bodies than it did into the more revolutionary concept of the United Front. This, too, was the position of a large part of the Labour movement, and further approaches from the C.P. to the Labour Party met with the same rebuff.

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1. I.L.P., Mins., March 1933.
2. ibid., November 1933.
3. ibid., January 1934.

Yet the C.P., in line with trends within the world Communist movement, was beginning to modify its concept of the United Front. In 1935 it declared that it was prepared to support the fight for a Labour Government if the Labour Party would commit itself to defending 'the most essential economic and political interests of the working class.'[1] In September 1935 the Bristol branch of the C.P. held a meeting to put forward the policy of the United Front with the Labour Party at the forthcoming Municipal and General Elections, and to gain support for the C.P.'s application for affiliation to the Labour Party.[2] But still the official response was predictably hostile.

The call for unity did find an echo within some sections of the Labour Party. The application for affiliation was, according to Hutt, a test case, to gauge the support for unity within the Labour Party.[3] In Bristol it only raised an echo within the East C.L.P. - that same party which had been reluctant to implement the Liverpool decisions in 1926. Most C.L.P.s ignored the issue. The West C.L.P. voted not to support the affiliation.[4] But in the East, the St. George West ward party urged the General Council of the East C.L.P. to support the affiliation, and the party took up its recommendation.[5] In June in an attempt to consolidate and build on this trend within the East C.L.P., the Bristol East group of the C.P. wrote to Rogers suggesting a joint campaign for an Infant School on the new Speedwell Housing Estate, and it was agreed to run a joint meeting.[6] The following month the St. Anne's Park group of the C.P. offered their assistance in the forthcoming Municipal elections in the Brislington ward.

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1. A. Hutt, op.cit., p.270.
2. W.D.P., 27 September 1935; B.E.P., ibid.
3. A. Hutt, op.cit., p.283.
4. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., August 1936.
5. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., January, April 1936.
6. Bristol East group C.P., to Rogers, June 1936, and reply.

'so that no stone shall be left unturned in an effort to secure the Brislington ward for Labour'.[1] Rogers replied that, 'We shall be pleased to have your assistance, trusting that by our united efforts we shall win the seat for the workers' representation in that ward.'[2] It was the East G.L.P. which was to become the launching pad for the United Front campaign within the Bristol Labour movement.

The experience of the military revolt against the Republican Government in Spain provoked a thoroughgoing reappraisal of attitudes within the Labour movement. The official Labour Party policy, at first, was to support the Government policy of non-intervention. Within a few months, however, the party leadership had been forced by the hostility of the party's own rank and file to take up the call of 'Arms for Spain'.[3] The Spanish Civil War, above all, brought about an abandonment of pacifism by the Labour left, who were at one with the I.L.P. and the C.P. in demanding aid for the Republicans from Britain. Signs of this trend had been apparent before in the East G.L.P.'s refusal to affiliate to the Peace Council. But the situation had remained confused, and remnants of the old pacifism persisted.

Cripps, however, was beginning to argue the case for peace and an independent approach to foreign policy in socialist terms. Many of his speeches in Bristol even in the early 1930s had been on the theme of peace and disarmament, but had been argued in Christian pacifist terms.[4] But in 1935, at the Labour Party conference, he argued that so long as there was a capitalist government in power, the Labour Party should not be prepared to trust them to use their military power for other than

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1. St. Anne's Park Group, C.P., to Rogers, 8 July 1936.
2. H. E. Rogers to St. Anne's Park Group C.P., July 1936.
3. R. Miliband, op.cit., p.255.
4. Cripps' papers; Notes for several of his speeches on the theme of peace and disarmament have survived.

capitalist and imperialist ends. The League of Nations, he said, was nothing but a 'tool of the imperialist powers', and the only course open to the workers was to fight against capitalism to install a socialist state.[1] These arguments were echoed within his own constituency party. In May 1936, the St. George East ward party offered as a resolution for the Labour Party conference the following: 'That this conference instructs the N.E.C. that in the event of any war arising, the Labour movement shall offer its relentless opposition to the Government, and use the situation created for the overthrow of the Government and the establishment of a socialist state. Further, that under no circumstances should the Labour Party co-operate with the Government in its war preparations.'[2] Not only pacifism came under scrutiny, but many of the political concepts which were part of the Labour Party's stock in trade and which had enabled it to establish itself within the parliamentary system, such as the 'national interest', were examined afresh. Thus, in a speech in April 1937 Cripps complained that in its approach to the problems of the moment, 'The class struggle basis of the political and industrial situation is not only completely ignored, but every effort is made to keep it under in order that a statesmanlike atmosphere of working in the 'National Interest' may be maintained.'[3]

Behind the socialist rhetoric, however, there was little change in the approach of the Labour left to the problems of the moment. The immediate response in Bristol to the Spanish events was the formation of a Bristol Committee for the Defence of Spanish Democracy. The initiative in forming this Committee, as with the Peace Council, came from the Labour movement. Its approach, however, was moderate, for it sought to be a broad front coalition. The Chairman was a University Professor, and among the

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1. E. Estorick, op.cit., p.143.
2. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., May 1936.
3. R. S. Cripps, 'The New Masses', Speech delivered in Bristol 9 May 1937, (Cripps' Papers).

Committee members were other academics, four clergymen and two Labour members of the City Council.[1] Demonstrations organised jointly with the Trades Council, B.L.P., and the Bristol Co-operative Society, confined themselves to calling for the recall of Parliament and the enforcement of the arms embargo against the rebels.[2] Yet the Labour left, and the C.P., who supported the Committee, and spoke from the platform at protest meetings, did not attempt to offer an alternative policy. All sections of the Labour movement lined up behind the Committee, from the East C.L.P. and the C.P., to the Political Committee of the Co-op. Party, the South C.L.P. and the B.L.P., although the former were dissatisfied with the Labour Party's support for non-intervention.

The unanimity was illusory. When Cripps and the Socialist League joined with the C.P. and the I.L.P. to launch their campaign for a United Front 'against Fascism, Reaction and War', the local Labour movement was split down the middle. The Labour Party National Executive Committee rejected the call for unity and disaffiliated the Socialist League.[3] But the Unity Campaign was continued by Cripps and his allies within the Bristol East C.L.P., together with former members of the League, such as Reade. A meeting of the East C.L.P.'s General Council on 27th January, the day that the Socialist League was expelled from the Labour Party, expressed its regret at the decision and his opinion that 'the advancement of the working class can only be achieved by a united working class

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1. B.E.P., 5 April 1937; The University Professor was Professor J. F. Crofts. Another committee was established to organise a collection to buy an ambulance for the Republicans in Spain. Among those who served on this committee were the Labour councillor, A. W. Cox, who was Chairman, and Mr. Parkin and Dr. C. F. Powell who were Treasurer and Secretary respectively. (W.D.P. 17 April 1937). The Rev. Kenneth Parry was also involved. Organisations represented at the meeting to set up this committee included trade unions, the Co-operative movement, the Liberal, Labour and Communist parties, one local Conservative organisation, as well as religious, educational, social and peace organisations. (B.E.P., 5 April 1937).
2. B.E.P., 23 September 1936.
3. R. Miliband, op.cit., p.250.

movement along the lines proposed by the Socialist League, I.L.P. and C.P.'[1] Much depended now on whether support for the campaign could be mobilised at rank and file level. In Bristol East there was little difficulty. The St. George East and West wards voted in favour of unity,[2] and the new Hillfields ward party, which straddled both the East and North constituencies, also came down in favour.[3] In its resolution the party criticised the N.E.C. for being 'short-sighted and out of touch with rank and file feeling in disaffiliating the Socialist League.' The meeting further pointed out that '... the growing desire for unity has already found expression in the association on the platform of many prominent Labour leaders with the representatives of outside bodies; whilst all over the country such bodies as the Bristol Peace Council have long been in operation without any action being taken against those party organisations affiliated thereto.'[4]

This statement showed the left's confusion on the question of unity, for the Peace Council was intended to be a non-political coalition, dedicated to the maintenance of peace, but whose unity was possible only if the issue was kept vague. The United Front, on the other hand, was unashamedly working class and socialist in approach, and its programme was one of class demands. It was, in other words, a challenge to the politics of accommodation of which the Peace Council itself was an example. It stood for '... action, for attack, for the ending of retreat, for building of the strength, unity and power of the working class movement.'[5] In launching the campaign, Cripps told the East C.L.P., the Socialist League was attempting to revivify the movement around a new programme

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., January 1927.
2. B.E.P., 2 February 1937; Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 24 Feb. 1937.
3. W.D.P., 10 February 1937.
4. W.D.P., 10 February 1937.
5. Hutt, op.cit., p.305.

based on class struggle rather than class accommodation, and to save it from the slow death being brought about by the apathy of its members. It was seized on by the East C.L.P. as a chance of stopping 'the rot which has set in in recent years.'[1]

Not everybody in the local movement saw it in that light. The Hillfields ward resolution failed to gain support at the North C.L.P. General Council,[2] and the South C.L.P., too, decided to abide by the national party policy.[3] Of the other C.L.P.s, the attitude of the Central is not known, while that of the West was equivocal. A number of Socialist League members were prominent in the West C.L.P. but were by no means able to dominate it, and the party eventually decided to postpone discussion on the issue until they had received further instructions from Head Office.[4] Undoubtedly, electoral considerations played a part in these decisions, for an association with the C.P. was regarded as politically damaging, particularly at a time when Labour was on the brink of its first majority in the Council. The East C.L.P. had been persuaded by such arguments in 1926, when it discussed the Liverpool resolutions. By 1937 these considerations carried less weight in the East because its parliamentary majority seemed secure, and most of the Council elections in the division were uncontested. Other C.L.P.s were in a far less advantageous position, and thus were more sensitive about giving their opponents the chance to damage them politically.

The spearhead of the opposition to the campaign in Bristol, however, was the T.G.W.U. and its Regional Secretary, Donovan. This mirrored the situation in the country at large where Bevin was Cripps's most virulent

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 2 May 1937.
2. Hillfields Ward Labour Party, Mins., 8 March 1937.
3. B.E.P., 3 February 1937.
4. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 15 March 1937.

opponent. On January 29th, Donovan issued a statement repudiating any association with the C.P., I.L.P. or Socialist League and charging the C.P. with disruptive activities in the Unions.[1] 'I am convinced,' he said in a letter to the press, 'that if the British Labour movement accepted the affiliation of the C.P., many hundreds of thousands of loyal men and women who now support the Labour Party because of its belief in democracy and freedom would withdraw that support.'[2] Under Donovan's leadership, the T.G.W.U. began intervening against the Labour left in local Labour politics on a new scale. There thus developed a clash between conservative trades union officials, who regarded themselves as the backbone of the movement, the true representatives of working class aspirations, and who had never deserted the movement in times of crisis - unlike the middle-class intellectuals of the Mosley and MacDonald ilk - and the constituency-based left, who also regarded themselves as the backbone of the movement, since it was they who carried the bulk of election work and day to day party activity, and who resented the use of trades union block votes to impose their views upon the movement.

Despite the failure to win support from the other C.L.P.s in Bristol, the East's United Front campaign succeeded in gathering support in the movement at large. The conflict was not simply a clash between trades unionists and individual members. The Tailors and Garment Workers[3] and the E.T.U. branches opposed the campaign,[4] and the N.U.R. No. I branch withdrew its delegate from the East General Council.[5] But an impressive array of trades union branches announced their support, including the A.E.U. No. 6,[6] the Society of Painters,[7] and even the National Union ofClerks,[8] as well as the 3/86 engineering branch of the T.G.W.U.[9] Thus even in

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1. W.D.P., 30 January 1937.
2. B.E.P., 9 February 1937.
3. W.D.P., 1 February 1937.
4. E.T.U., Bristol No. 1 Branch, Mins., February 1937.
5. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 28 April 1937.
6. B.E.P., 1 March 1937.
7. ibid.
8. B.E.P., 19 February 1937.
9. B.E.P., 1 March 1937.

Donovan's own union there was opposition to official policy. It is perhaps significant that the T.G.W.U. branch which was most firmly behind Donovan was the 3/90 Fry's branch, one which the Regional Secretary and numerous other local officials had paid special attention to in previous years; Bevin was personally involved in negotiations with Fry's,[1] and therefore with the Fry's branch. Such branches, in factories where conflicts were muted and where a close relationship had been able to develop between management and union officials appear to have provided those officials with a base for their conservative policies within the local Labour movement.

There was support also from within the Co-op. movement. The Filton Men's Guild, for example, informed the Society's Political Committee of its support for the campaign.[2] When, therefore, the campaign was effectively launched in Bristol at a mass rally on February 13, with Cripps, Pollitt and Maxton the main speakers, 2500 were present, and local Labour councillors and aldermen, such as Hennessy, Rogers, Gleeson, and Poole, who was also Vice-President of the B.L.P., joined C.P. and I.L.P. members on the platform.[3] Even within the Labour group on the Council, then, there was a substantial body of support for the campaign. Of the 13 councillors and 4 aldermen from Bristol East, 10 and 3 signed the United Front pledge card.[4] When Donovan asked the B.L.P. to declare its support for the N.E.C.'s decision he was by no means assured of a majority. The T.G.W.U. conducted a vigorous campaign against the United Front. On 13th February, as a counter-attraction to the Colston Hall meeting, Bevin addressed a T.G.W.U. meeting at the Victoria Rooms, and bitterly attacked

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1. B.E.P., 12 March 1937; A resolution declaring loyalty to the N.E.C. decision was moved at the B.L.P. by Donovan, on behalf of the 3/90 Fry's Branch, T.G.W.U.
2. B.C.S./P.C., Mins., 10 March 1937.
3. W.D.P., 15 February 1937; B.E.P., ibid.
4. W.D.P., 1 February 1937.

Cripps, whom he compared with MacDonald and Mosley, for splitting the movement.[1] The union held a conference of its branch officers and Labour Party delegates to decide local policy, and in the Labour group,[2] T.G.W.U. members challenged the right of the I.L.P. secretary Berriman to attend Group meetings.[3] There was a threat to withdraw T.G.W.U. delegates from the East C.L.P.[4] At the B.L.P. meeting on 25th February, Donovan attempted to force the local movement to decide its attitude to the campaign.[5]

Because of the widespread support for the United Front among trade unionists and Labour Party activists, an attempt to enforce loyalty to N.E.C. decisions raised the real danger of an even greater rift within the movement. The Bristol Co-operative Society Political Committee came forward as a mediator, and proposed that a decision be deferred for a fortnight.[6] When the B.L.P. again discussed the matter on 11th March, there was another attempt by Donovan to bring matters to a head, but it again failed, and a Co-operative amendment that, in the absence of a definite instruction from the N.E.C., no decision was called for at present, was passed.[7] The matter was allowed to rest there for another month. In April, more support for Cripps was expressed by a conference of the Bristol and District Labour Association, a body of representatives of the C.L.P.s, which condemned the N.E.C. for disaffiliating the Socialist League and threatening to expel socialists from the Labour Party '... at a time when the unity of forces of the working class against the danger of war and fascism is of supreme importance.'[8]

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1. W.D.P., 15 February 1937; Bevin told the Annual Festival of T.G.W.U. Area No. 3 that: 'I believe that if that unholy trinity of MacDonald, Baldwin and Samuel, acting for months in conspiracy to bring a split in the Labour Party between 1929 and 1931, together with assistance at the election of 1931 of the vicious venom of Snowden and the treachery of Thomas, failed to break us, then nothing Cripps, Pollitt and Maxton or anybody can do will ever break us.'
2. W.D.P., 6 February 1937.
3. B.E.P., 2 March 1937.
4. W.D.P., 6 February 1937.
5. W.D.P., 26 February 1937; B.E.P., ibid.
6. ibid.
7. W.D.P., 12 March 1937; B.C.S./P.C., Mins., 10 March 1937.
8. W.D.P., 5 April 1937; B.E.P., ibid.

But the N.E.C. was beginning to take a tougher line against opponents of its policy. In April the B.L.P. received a letter informing it that members who did not conform would be asked to resign, and a B.L.P. meeting called to discuss the letter passed with an overwhelming majority a resolution proposed by Donovan calling for loyalty to the N.E.C.[1] The unity campaign in Bristol was effectively dead. A special meeting of the East's General Council in May decided, on Cripps's advice, to continue it even if this meant expulsion from the party,[2] but little was heard of the United Front in the following months. The attention of the East C.L.P. was turned inwards, towards efforts to make the Labour Party more democratic and thus it was reasoned more likely to adopt socialist policies. Its conference resolutions in 1937 reflect this trend; '... the time has arrived,' the East C.L.P. said, 'for a more democratic basis for election of the N.E.C. to enable the movement to reflect the opinion of the membership in the country.'[3] The resolution proposed a change in the basis of representation on the N.E.C. to give the constituency parties more weight. The arbitrariness of the N.E.C.'s decision in expelling the Socialist League had been a great shock to many constituency activists, and turned their attention much more towards the problems of power within the national movement. But while the unity campaign itself had become a dead letter, the idea of unity was kept alive. Through the Left Book Club, and through joint work,[4] with the C.P. on the Spanish Civil war issue, East C.L.P. members continued their own united front. Moreover, the West C.L.P. finally declared its support in its conference resolutions, decided on in June 1937, calling on the Labour Party to '... take immediate

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1. D.H.P., 23 April 1937; B.E.P., ibid.
2. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 2 May 1937.
3. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 26 May 1937.
4. ibid., 29 September 1937; Reference to a Left Book Club meeting, of which the chairman was Hennessy, and speakers were Gollancz and Pollitt.

steps to unite the entire working class movement in a great campaign to secure the overthrow of the National Government as an immediate means of bringing peace, defeating fascism, and opening the way to an inspiring socialist advance.'[1]

Such appeals fell on deaf ears. There was no possibility that the N.E.C., as then constituted, or the trades union officials who controlled the block votes, would agree to a United Front that included communists. All efforts were being made both within the Labour Party and in the trades unions to expunge communist influence. A particularly sensitive area for example, was the Labour Party's League of Youth which tended to be critical of the party N.E.C. for its lack of militancy. Undoubtedly there had been infiltration of the League by the C.P.'s Young Communist League, and in 1936 the N.E.C. decided to counter this influence by reducing the maximum age of elegibility for membership from 25 to 21, disbanding the League's National Advisory Committee, closing down its journal and suspending its annual conference.[2] The aim was to bring the youth movement more under the control of local Labour Party organisations and thus curb its autonomy. Predictably, the East C.L.P. protested against this decision, and refused to implement the new rules in the Bristol East branch of the League.[3] But, in a rather perverse way, the reorganisation of the League led to a renaissance of youth work in the Bristol Labour movement. C.L.P.s received, in 1937, a letter from the N.E.C. advising the formation of League branches in the divisions, and branches were formed in the North, where youth work had been practically non-existent for several years,[4] and revitalised in the other divisions, with a much greater interest in them on the part of the parent parties. A local

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1. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 14 June 1937.
2. R. Miliband, op.cit., p.246.
3. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 29 July 1936, 27 January 1937.
4. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 11 January 1937.

Advisory Committee was established in 1938 to co-ordinate the activities of the branches locally.[1] But the reorganisation did not stop communist infiltration, and on a number of issues the League took a stand independently of official Labour Party policy. Largely for this reason, in August 1939 the Bristol Advisory Committee was itself wound up by the B.L.P., and a large proportion of its membership joined the Y.C.L.[2]

The official Labour Party and trades union opposition to the Unity Campaign was motivated by the fact that the initiative for a United Front had come from the C.P. Labour leaders, both local and national, were not universally opposed to united fronts as such, only to those which included communists. The Peace Council was an alliance of Labour organisations with Liberals and non-political bodies. Moreover, the Unity Campaign's commitment to the politics of class struggle was totally alien to the politics of accommodation which were central to the Labour Party's philosophy. The campaign was significant, therefore, in that it signalled the emergence within the local movement of a large group of Labour Party activists who were prepared to reject class collaborationist politics, and to re-define the Labour movement in a way that would make it not merely electorally, but also ideologically, independent. This group was based most firmly within the East C.L.P., a party drawing support from an area with a tradition of political radicalism, that had shown itself the most willing of all local Labour Parties in Bristol to involve itself in the day-to-day struggles of workers, particularly of the unemployed, and the party that had most developed its own internal life, and its own infra-structure. Its dependence was manifested not merely in its attitude towards bourgeois parties, but also towards the

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1. Bristol South C.L.P., G.C. Mins., January 1938.
2. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 2 August 1939.

Labour Party itself. Increasingly during the 1930s the East C.L.P., described as a model division by the Regional Organiser in 1932, became a thorn in the side of the party N.E.C., and of the S.L.P. and local trades union officials.

Yet no sooner had independent class politics begun to emerge within the local movement and specifically within the East C.L.P., than it was submerged and sublimated. The occasion for this reversal was the campaign for the 'Popular Front', which began to gain momentum during 1938, and eventually led to Cripps' expulsion from the Labour Party in January 1939. Why the advocates of an uncompromisingly class-based United Front should throw their weight behind a much more nebulous 'People's Front', which had strong Liberal sponsorship, is by no means clear.[1] The defeat of the United Front proposal in the Labour movement created something of a hiatus on the Labour Party left, for it posed the awkward dilemma of whether to accept party discipline and cease their advocacy of such a scheme, or whether to break with the party and unite the forces of the left outside. Resignation from the Labour Party was a course which few, if any, of the United Front advocates would contemplate, and they were prepared to disband the Socialist League rather than be expelled.

But the situation in Europe steadily worsened; war drew inexorably closer, and still the P.L.P.'s opposition to the National Government's policies remained ineffectual. This created a curious situation in the country. The rise of the dictators, the Spanish Civil war, and the approach of war, had heightened the political consciousness of the electorate to an awareness that the political struggle vitally affected their very survival. But, as Mowat has pointed out, this mobilisation

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1. It should be noted, however, that the change in the C.P.'s policy can easily be explained by reference to the change in world Communist policy decided on by the Comintern in favour of Popular Front policies.

of public opinion occurred largely outside the political parties, and found expression in new semi-political and non-political organisations.[1] An example of this was the Bristol Peace Council. Yet, as Mowat has not realised, this newly awakened public opinion had a curious relationship with the Labour movement, for while the political consciousness was nebulous, and did not crystallise into a coherent political philosophy, those who attached themselves to the Peace Council and similar bodies looked to the Labour movement as the only organised political force in the country that had retained even a vestige of independence from the National Government, and thus could offer an alternative to appeasement. The Labour Party provided the leadership in the Peace Council. Another indication of the way people who had been indifferent to politics began to look to the Labour movement to provide a lead was the fact that each successive May Day demonstration in the later 1930s, when the Labour movement condemned fascism and war, and resolved to defend 'freedom and peace', was better attended than the last, and those in 1938 and 1939 were reported to have had massive turn-outs.[2] Whatever the failings of the P.L.P., it was to the Labour movement that the opponents of appeasement looked for leadership.

Paradoxically, the relationship between the Labour Party and the Peace Council was beginning to break down. As the P.L.P. abandoned its opposition to rearmament and as the B.L.P. fell in behind official party policy, the link with the Peace Council was broken. In September 1937 the South C.L.P. decided not to reaffiliate to the Council 'in accordance with the B.L.P. decision',[3] and the North C.L.P.'s affiliation ended in 1938.[4]

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1. C. L. Mowat, op.cit., p.578.
2. e.g., B.E.P., 8 May 1939.
3. Bristol South C.L.P., G.C. Mins., September 1937.
4. Bristol North C.L.P., G.C. Mins., October 1939; 'Agreed that as we had not sent a representative to the Peace Council for the past year, that we do not affiliate.' The Hillfields ward Labour Party renewed its affiliation in September 1938.

The Council continued to operate, but as a far less prominent focus of the opposition to the Government's foreign policy. It was superceded by the campaign launched in the spring of 1938 by the Co-operative newspaper, Reynolds News, for a United Peace Alliance.[1] But this campaign, unlike the Peace Council, drew its sponsorship and main support within the Labour movement from the left-wing, for example the Bristol East C.L.P. The urgency of the situation, it was argued by Cripps who supported the campaign, demanded as wide a coalition of 'progressive' forces as possible in an anti-fascist front.[2] Included in the term 'progressive' was a broad political spectrum from the Liberals to the communists, and if such a coalition involved socialists submerging their politics in the interests of a wider unity, then this was the price they were prepared to pay. There were precedents; the Committee for the Defence of Spanish Democracy had been an ad hoc example of such a coalition, and one in which socialists and communists had played down their political differences with their new-found allies among the liberals, in an attempt to protect democracy, rather than to further socialism.

This was the tone also of the Popular Front campaign. The idea, as launched in Reynolds News, and taken up by The News Chronicle was for the widest possible coalition of progressive forces. The Bristol Co-operative Political Committee supported the campaign and urged the B.L.P. to give it serious consideration.[3] The East C.L.P., too, agreed to identify itself with the Peace Alliance.[4] In April a Peace Demonstration was held at the Colston Hall at which Hennessy presided, and Cripps was joined on the platform by a Liberal M.P., W. Roberts.[5] The resolution contained nothing

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1. B.C.S./P.C., Mins., April 1938.
2. E. Estorick, op.cit., p.162.
3. B.C.S./P.C., Mins., April 1938.
4. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 27 April 1938.
5. W.D.P., 30 April 1938.

of the demands that had informed the earlier Unity Campaign but instead demanded arms for Spain and a declaration by the Government that it was willing 'to join with other nations in measures of collective security and economic co-operation for the defence of democracy and the maintenance of world peace.'

The campaign reached its height in the autumn of 1938. It was given a tremendous boost by the Government's handling of the Munich crisis, and the carve up of Czechoslovakia. The Labour movement was outraged by the Munich settlement. All C.L.P.s, the B.L.P. and Trades Council, and the League of Youth joined in condemning Chamberlain for the betrayal of the Czechs, and in demanding the recall of Parliament.[1] Labour protest meetings were quickly organised, at which the principles of collective security with France and Russia were advocated as the only means of ensuring a lasting peace.[2] The Peace Council, too, attacked the settlement as one that was not founded 'on justice, and it cannot lead to a permanent peaceful settlement.'[3] Donovan on the right and the East C.L.P. on the left united in protest. But the Labour movement as a whole was not unanimous. Some leading members of the Labour group, notably Aldermen Burgess and Milton, were prepared to support efforts to maintain peace at any price. Milton, who was Lord Mayor at the time, paid tribute to Chamberlain's 'unprecedented effort on the cause of peace.'[4] Among this group the priority seemed to be the continuation of that spirit of moderation and accommodation that had guided the Labour group's policies during its period as majority party on the City Council.

Official Labour Party policy was support for a system of collective security with France and Russia. This concept was the projection onto

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1. e.g., B.E.P., 22 September 1938, Trades and Labour Council delegate meeting; W.D.P., 20 September 1938; Bristol South C.L.P.
2. W.D.P., 26 September 1938.
3. W.D.P., 5 October 1938.
4. B.E.P., 15 September 1938.

the international stage of the idea of a Popular Front at home against the National Government and appeasement. But whilst the Labour Party was prepared to adopt this concept in its foreign policy, it was totally opposed to the Popular Front at home. The campaign, however, did have a certain appeal to the wide spectrum of opinion which was looking for an alternative foreign policy. An indication of this was provided by the Bridgwater by-election in November 1938, when Vernon Bartlett, a journalist, standing as an Independent Progressive on a Popular Front programme, and with the support of the local Labour Party, was returned with a 2,332 majority.[1] Of particular interest in this election was the fact that Rogers, secretary of Bristol East C.L.P., and Cripps' agent, acted as agent for Bartlett, and transported to Bridgwater each day teams of Labour Party members to help in the election campaign. Cripps supported this effort.[2]

Following the success of this by-election Cripps decided to send a memorandum to the Labour Party Executive advocating that the party should take the lead in forming a Popular Front dedicated to the protection of democratic rights and liberties.and a policy of peace by co-operation with France, Russia and the U.S.A.[3] The Memorandum was rejected by the N.E.C., but Cripps took the unilateral decision to issue it to the press and Labour organisations. For this act of 'disloyalty' he was expelled.[4] But the Popular Front campaign continued in the form of the Petition movement within the Labour Party, in an attempt to get Cripps reinstated and his policies adopted. A direct appeal was made to the movement's rank and file.[5]

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1. Butler and Freeman, op.cit., p.153.
2. H. B. Rogers, Conversation with the author.
3. E. Estorick, op.cit., p.162.
4. ibid., p.163.
5. E. Estorick, op.cit., p.164.

The East C.L.P.'s General Council met in January 1939 and declared its support for Cripps's Memorandum; the party protested vigorously against the expulsion.[1] All five ward parties in the Constituency declared their support for Cripps and demanded his reinstatement.[2] The petition campaign centred, therefore, very largely on the East C.L.P. and its full-time secretary, Rogers. Throughout the Bristol Labour movement, and in the South-West region, Rogers attempted to mobilise support for Cripps. A series of public meetings was organised in the main towns in the area, and after each meeting a local Petition Committee was set up to carry on the work of mobilising the rank and file support.[3] A printed appeal was sent out from the East C.L.P. to 'its Comrades in other divisions,' asking not that they agree with the terms of the memorandum, but that they protest against the arbitrariness of the expulsion.[4] The replies were somewhat mixed. Some 32 C.L.P.s had expressed their support against only 8 opposed within days of the appeal being sent out.[5] Locally, for example, Thornbury C.L.P. supported Cripps.[6] But typical of the latent prejudices which Cripps' action brought to the surface was the reply from a Labour Party agent in Leicester who wrote that, 'Apart from the arm-chair revolutionaries of the Left Book Club and their communist associates, the general feeling here is that he ought to have been expelled years ago.'[7]

In Bristol Cripps and his constituency party conducted a vigorous Popular Front campaign. Mass meetings were held in February on two occasions,[8] and smaller meetings were held in the wards. After the ward

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1. Bristol East C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 15 January 1939.
2. B.E.P., 3 March 1939.
3. H. E. Rogers, Conversation with the author.
4. Bristol East C.L.P., Appeals to its Comrades in other Divisions, February 1939.
5. Bristol East C.L.P., papers, correspondence and papers concerning Cripps' reinstatement campaign, February 1939.
6. W.D.P., 30 January 1939.
7. Leicester Labour Party to Bristol East C.L.P., 14 February 1939.
8. B.E.P., 20 February 1939, 24 February 1939.

meetings, local Petition Committees were established, in Knowle West, Bedminster, Clifton, Avonmouth, Fishponds, Shirehampton, Eastville, Easton, Brislington, Bishopston, Horfield, St. George East and West and Hillfields.[1] The campaign found support, too, among trades unionists. In the A.S.W., numbers 4 and 5 branches sent resolutions to their union executive protesting at the expulsion and demanding that he be given the opportunity to present his case to the party conference.[2] The No. 1 branch of the Painters' Society also protested and called on the B.L.P. to demand his reinstatement, whilst dissociating itself from the Popular Front.[3] The balance of forces within the Labour movement lined up much as they had during the earlier Unity campaign. In the East, there was fairly solid support for Cripps, although at a meeting in Easton he was severely criticised by local Labour councillors for his advocacy of the Popular Front.[4] Both the South and the North C.L.P.s expressed their support for the N.E.C.'s decisions,[5] and the B.L.P. came down against Cripps.[6] Predictably, the T.G.W.U. was forthright in its opposition to the 'attempts of certain people to disrupt the Labour Party by advocating an alliance with the Liberal Party, many of whose members are employers of Labour who are bitterly opposed to trades unionism.'[7] N.U.B.S.O. members, also, voted in favour of the N.E.C. decision.[8]

As in 1937, so in 1939, the attitude of the West C.L.P. was equivocal. In February the General Council expressed its opposition to the expulsion,[9] and in March, refused to accept the N.E.C.'s ruling on the Popular Front.[10]

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1. B.E.P., 6 March 1939.
2. A.S.W., Monthly Journal, May 1939.
3. W.D.P., 30 January 1939.
4. W.D.P., 11 March 1939.
5. Bristol South C.L.P., G.C. Mins., February-March 1939.
   Bristol North C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 17 February 1939.
6. W.D.P., 10 March 1939.
7. B.E.P., 2 February 1939.
8. N.U.B.S.O., Kingswood Branch, Mins., 13 February 1939.
9. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 6 February 1939.
10. ibid., 13 March 1939.

But later that month a special meeting of the General Council was called at the insistence of the South-West Regional Organiser, C. C. Jones, to reconsider the matter, and both he and Donovan, representing the B.L.P., urged the delegates to accept the N.E.C.'s ruling. The original decision was reversed, and the East C.L.P. had lost its only ally among the local C.L.P.s.[1] The Popular Front campaign continued through the spring of 1939, with a mass meeting in April,[2] but in June it was announced that it had been wound up since it was no longer practical politics.[3]

In advocating the Popular Front, Cripps and his allies had left themselves wide open to attack on their left flank, for it was now possible for the N.E.C., for Bevin and the T.G.W.U., and their many opponents in Bristol to attack them from the standpoint of independent politics. Yet the Popular Front as a tactic was, in many ways, precisely what the Labour Party and trades unions themselves had been practising at a local level on specific issues such as unemployment and peace, ever since 1918, and before that. Whenever an independent class response had been called for, the Labour Party had proved incapable of providing it, and had joined with Christian, charitable, and other political groups, excluding only the communists and fascists, in promoting broad front coalitions. The Popular Front concept was a logical extension to the politics of accommodation. But there was always another side to the political complexion of the Labour Party - its tenacity in preserving its electoral independence. In that the Popular Front involved a sacrifice of this independence, it was bitterly opposed not only by the N.E.C., but throughout the movement, and evoked an opposition that was expressed in

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1. Bristol West C.L.P., G.C. Mins., 27th March 1939.
2. W.D.P., 3 April 1939.
3. W.D.P., 12 June 1939.

terms of class struggle. Thus Cripps was attacked at a meeting in Easton by Councillor Cox who said, 'I have always worked and striven for the working classes, and I am not going to ally myself with people who are the hereditary enemies of the working classes.'[1]

The possibilities that had seemed to exist in 1937, at the time of the Unity Campaign, of there being a firm base within the movement for independent class politics had proved to be abortive. Yet this was a trend which afflicted the whole of the left at that time, for the communists too had thrown their weight behind the Popular Front campaign. As for those of Cripps's supporters who remained after Cripps had been expelled, they still had their hopes. Rogers wrote to a colleague in January 1939:

' ... It is good to know that there are still rank and file members of the Labour movement who have not yet lost faith.

I have always understood, having been a member of the Labour Party for the past 25 years, that it had a mission to help the common people. I cannot see how the drift of the party during the past few years is, in any way, in keeping with this idea. I do hope however, that out of the present crisis a Labour movement will evolve, strong and virile and, upon a democratic basis able to go forward to bring about a real emancipation of the workers of this country.'[2]

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1. W.D.P., 11 March 1939.
2. R. E. Rogers to V. Luxemburg, 30 January 1939.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

In 1910 the Bristol Labour movement could look back on a generation of established political activity in the city, and on the experience of militancy in the trades union struggles of 1889-1893. The Labour movement was an established force within the political, social and economic life of the city. But, in terms of achievement and current membership, the striking fact about that movement at the beginning of our period was its weakness. The lack of achievement, and its minority position, lay at the root of the continuing dilemma of how, and on the basis of what programme, to supplant the Liberals as the major radical force in local politics, and establish the Labour party as the predominant vehicle of the working class political presence.

Before 1910, through the efforts of the I.L.P. in winning trade union support for independent Labour representation, the Labour movement had been groping towards a position of clear independence from the Liberals, rather than opt for the seductive charms of an alliance with the Liberals. This culminated in the formation of the Bristol L.R.C. in 1908. But, as we have seen, the organisational independence thus established was not underpinned by a clear ideological separation. The L.R.C. was hesitant in coming forward with a socialist programme, and the I.L.P., unlike the S.D.P., was prepared to compromise in putting off the consideration of such a programme to an indeterminate future date. In their approach to local political issues before 1914 the I.L.P., as much as more conservative elements in the L.R.C., took the hegemony of the bourgeois parties as read; indeed, on issues where class interests clearly conflicted, such as unemployment, housing, and ownership of local services, their approach was guided by middle class, rather than working class assumptions about 'social problems.'

Ultimately, the development of a truly independent working class party depended on the growth of a more developed and more widespread class consciousness. There were a number of reasons why this growth had been stunted in Bristol. In some local industries, such as tobacco, which were capital intensive, owners and managers could and did afford to provide workers with amenities and above average wages, which inevitably tended to soften conflicts between employers and employees. This factor was particularly important in such industries, for the large factories which were their characteristic unit of production might ordinarily have been expected to produce the opposite result. It was also in such industries that the tradition of family control and paternalistic management tended to linger even in newly enlarged, oligopolistic firms. In other industries, such as boot and shoe manufacture, the predominantly small scale units of production hampered union organisation.

The very diversity of local industry meant that, even if a majority of local workers had been unionised, this would not automatically have resulted in a growth in class consciousness. For the concept of class consciousness implies not merely a recognition that a particular group of workers shares interests separate and opposed to those of their employers, but also that this group of workers shares common ground with other groups in other industries, and that class solidarity transcends sectional loyalties.

Relationships at work impinged directly on workers' consciousness of class relationships. Of importance, also, were social contacts between classes, which the more paternalistic employers were keen to promote. A shared allegiance to a chapel provided an important area of common ground between employer and worker. Out of this grew the socio-economic mission work, promoted and financed by leading employers, often in response to a growing restlessness amongst their workers. Thus the

period of greatest activity in the Adult Schools and Brotherhoods was the first decade of the new century, after the shock of 1889 had been digested.

Long term trends were beginning to work in favour of the Labour movement. The tendency towards monopoly or oligopoly in industry, which affected many firms in Bristol during our period, led to a depersonalisation of work relationships. But within the larger companies, local traditions of paternalism continued and indeed, in response to the inroads of trades unionism, welfare work was stepped up. Moreover, workers in industries such as tobacco were relatively sheltered from the vicissitudes of the inter-war depression.

In politics, the long-term decline of the Liberal Party, concurrent with the decline of nonconformity, produced a vacuum which the Labour Party could fill. But again, this decline must not be exaggerated. Even after the war, there was a strong residual attachment to nonconformist religion among local workers, particularly in the south and east of the city, and the Labour Party's success there in supplanting Liberalism was helped by its contact with the chapels, the Brotherhoods and the Adult Schools.

In 1914 the Labour Party was no nearer achieving its goal than it had been in 1908; by 1923, with two Labour M.P.s returned to Parliament and a sizeable representation on the City Council, the party could claim to be the dominant expression of working class hopes and fears. That it had supplanted the Liberal Party was due in part to that party's abandonment of radicalism and its taking refuge in a conservative-dominated, negative coalition which represented the forces of property against the threat of socialism. It was due also to a growing class consciousness, a development in which the pre-war trades union struggles, the experiences of wartime and the post-war conflicts all played their part. Class was at the centre

of post-war politics in a more open, direct way than had hitherto been the case, and the action of many thousands of workers in voting Labour was a clear expression of their class consciousness.

In seeking to connect with these new developments the Labour Party had transformed itself, in 1918, into an outgoing, aggressive political party, attempting to build support through the painstaking process of electioneering and membership drives, and armed with a Socialist programme. But, as we have seen, there were ambiguities in this new departure; far from representing truly independent class politics, the Labour Party's programme of 1918 was in reality an attempt to connect with and radicalise a new collectivist consensus which appeared to be emerging during the war. The party's commitment to consensus politics was strengthened, not weakened, by this programme, and in the following years on a range of class issues the party continued to operate in the consensus spirit. Electoral independence, so jealously guarded by the Labour Party after 1918, was nevertheless a substitute for an independence based on a clear ideological break with the politics of accommodation in favour of a firm commitment to fighting on behalf of the party's working class supporters.

The Labour Party claimed not to be a class party. Yet, in voting for it, a growing number of workers regarded the Labour Party as their party. This contradiction and the tensions which it produced in the relationship between the party and its supporters were the most important feature of the period 1910 to 1926. The events of 1910 to 1912, the growing trend towards unionisation during the war and the conflicts of the post-war period demonstrated that large sections of the local working class, particularly dockers, transport workers, seamen, railwaymen and miners, were developing towards a militant class consciousness. They showed that, contrary to the predominant view in the I.L.P. and

constituency Labour Parties which underpinned their parliamentary strategy, workers were not merely passive onlookers to political events, nor mere empty receptacles in the process of their own political development, but were active and, to a greater or lesser extent, conscious participants, who were able to develop the capacity for class-wide action from within their own experience. The Triple Alliance, was a response to this 'movement', even though in practice the Alliance foundered on the entrenched sectionalism of the trade union bureaucracies.

There were very great weaknesses in a 'movement' so inchoate, so inarticulate in formulating aims, and so sporadic. The workers involved provided a very narrow base for class-wide action, although in any major confrontation, these were the key groups of workers, in the strategic industries. Moreover, the political development of this militant consciousness was limited. There was a stress on direct action, on the use of economic power to achieve results, with the general strike as an ultimate weapon. But the consciousness manifested by the mass of workers who engaged in sympathy strikes and who pinned great hopes on the Triple Alliance, never achieved the level even of syndicalism. Such questions as industrial unionism and workers' control of industry were only marginally important. Nevertheless, solidarity strikes testified to a militant class consciousness more clearly than did votes for the Labour Party which, locked within the confines of its parliamentary strategy, proved incapable of reflecting that consciousness.

Throughout the period 1910 to 1926 there was continual tension between the trade union and political wings of the movement over their respective roles. But the conflict was not simply one between political and economic action, contrary to the way the question was posed by Ayles and others; it was a question of the whole political direction to be taken by the Labour movement, and the respective roles of parliamentary

and trades union action within that context. Was it to be a movement of accommodation with the existing system, in which parliamentary and trades union action were clearly separate and adhered strictly to the conventions and rules of parliamentary political action? Or was it to be a movement in which the use of economic power for political ends had a role? If so, what was that role? Was it to be a mere adjunct of the parliamentary struggle, as many of the Direct Actionists wished, or was it to be the main thrust of the working class in its battle to achieve economic and political emancipation? This last possibility was not fully articulated within the local movement, except by a small revolutionary minority, yet it cannot be entirely ruled out, for the actions of groups of workers themselves, in continually looking to their industrial strength as a means of attack or defence, provided a potential springboard for the emergence of such a strategy.

Thus although the parliamentary strategy was the one which finally triumphed, this was not a foregone conclusion. It was achieved only after considerable struggle between the I.L.P. and G.L.P.s on the one hand, against the reliance of many rank and file trades unionists on their own collective strength on the other. Before and after the war, Ayles intervened in strikes to attempt to steer them away from political confrontations, and to stress the need for parliamentary action. The advice of the Labour leadership, when faced with a mobilisation, however partial, of the working class, was 'leave it to us'. Yet for much of the first half of our period, there was no urgency on the part of workers to respond. Bevin, in 1918, had great difficulty in persuading even his own members to vote for him.

The combined effects of defeat, in 1921 and 1926, and demoralisation arising out of mass unemployment, brought about a change. But we should not ignore in this context the role of the trades union leadership. Before 1914, in response to movement among the rank and file, many leaders

flirted with syndicalism. Bevin and Tillett were among them. Yet, at the same time, in their day to day trade union work, their efforts to institutionalise conflict revealed the emptiness of their commitment to syndicalism. The war, with its increased opportunities and greater pressures for incorporation of the leadership into the state, consolidated the tendency to rely on conciliation and arbitration. Whitleyism and the B.A.I.R., in which several union leaders were closely involved, was a natural expression and extension of this trend.

After the war, leaders such as Bevin were again placed in a contradictory situation, for the actions of their own members, and the attitude of the employers and the state, continually threatened to drag them into conflicts which they had not sought, and whose consequences they feared. To stand aside would have been to lose control completely. They thus placed themselves at the head of movements among their members in order more effectively to keep them within manageable limits. At the same time, despite the brief flirtation with direct action during 1919-20, Bevin joined other local union leaders, such as Whitefield, in arguing for the importance of the return of a Labour Government and a legislative solution to working class problems. The hiving-off of politics into the parliamentary arena, which was the specific sphere of interest of the Labour Party, dovetailed very neatly into the efforts by union leaders to institutionalise conflict. The one depended on the other, for direct action, in pursuit of political ends, and solidarity strikes, undermined the attempts of trades union leaders to settle disputes through regulated procedural channels.

The Labour movement which emerged from the reconstruction of 1918 was one in which there was a clear commitment to parliamentary forms of action, and to a separation between political and trades union action. There was

to be no crossing of the lines of territorial division by either parliamentary or trades union leaderships. But at the local level the issue was by no means settled in 1918; tension within the movement continued, even after the Black Friday defeat of 1921. After the failure of the first Labour Government the question of a general strike was revived, albeit in a defensive context, and in such a way that, at least in the view of the trades union leadership, posed no challenge to the Labour Party's position as the political voice of the working class. Within such a strike there was the theoretical possibility that the established dividing line between political and trades union action would disappear. That this did not happen was due mainly to the fact that the general strike remained firmly under the control of the trades union bureaucracy. And when it became clear that, in order to win, the trades union leaders would have to confront the State, and thus bring into question the whole orientation of the Labour movement towards accommodation, the strike was abandoned. Henceforth the Labour Party provided the only avenue open to workers through which to voice their grievances.

After 1926, the forces of accommodation within the movement were in the ascendant. Paradoxically the events of 1931 reinforced this trend. After MacDonald's departure, there was no abandonment of the policies for which he stood. The increasing involvement of a conservative trades union leadership in the affairs of the Labour Party ensured that this would be so, through their use of block votes at party conferences. But there was no corresponding increase in the involvement of rank and file trades unionists in the affairs of the local Labour Parties. Their main concern was with resisting wage cuts and unemployment, and preserving their organisation. In politics, they were relegated to the role of voters; the increasing bureaucratic control of the unions meant that organised involvement in the affairs of the Labour Party was strictly controlled,

whilst the general economic situation and the collapse of trades union militancy ruled out any assertion of political presence through other than parliamentary channels.

These trends did not go unchallenged within the movement. In 1928, it was the I.L.P. which led the opposition to Mondism. In the 1930s, the Socialist League, Cripps, and the Constituency left, well represented in the Bristol East and West C.L.P.s, kept up a long campaign for a more socialist party programme. Significantly, the main centre of opposition, unlike before 1926, was not in the unions. In the minds of many of the participants in these conflicts, and of subsequent historians of these years, the conflict was essentially one between conservative trades unionists, and the constituency and intellectual left-wing of the party.

In Bristol, the main protagonists were Bevin and the T.G.W.U., aligned with the B.L.P. officials, against Cripps, the Socialist League, and the Bristol East C.L.P. But the conflict cut across these convenient dividing lines. Some branches of the T.G.W.U., together with branches of other unions, lined up with Cripps. Conversely, the South and North C.L.P.s were on the side of the N.E.C. and Bevin, but the two sides in the conflict thought and acted as though the dividing lines were clear cut. On the one side was suspicion of middle class intellectuals of the type that had let the party down in 1931. On the other hand was a body of M.P.s and constituency activists, worried at the direction party policy was taking, and who felt that they, who bore the major burden of routine party and election work, were denied a chance to alter that policy because the trades union leaders were manipulating the trades union block votes.

The left thus posed the question in terms of a conflict between the rank and file and the bureaucracy for inner party democracy. But talk of 'the rank and file' did not include the ordinary membership of the unions. Indeed, although in the United Front campaign there was an attempt to

relate to the immediate problems faced by workers, there was no recognition of the fact that it was primarily through the unions that any fight would have to be waged, and that this necessitated activating the rank and file of the unions in a movement for democracy within their unions. This is not to say that the left was unable to win trades union support, but this was largely incidental; it was not part of their scheme, nor was it actively sought. And although we can show that the unions were by no means monolithic, the constituency left continually acted as if this were the case.

The conflict in the movement during the 1930s differed from that of the pre-1926 period in several important respects. Firstly, the left was a more clearly identifiable force, putting forward clear socialist policies as an alternative to the official policies of accommodation. During the period before the general strike there was no clearly identifiable 'left' in this sense, for the whole movement had been in a state of flux, in the process of building its links with the working class. The struggle then had been with an attitude of mind among rank and file trades unionists which resisted attempts to institutionalise conflict and steer the movement wholeheartedly into parliamentary channels. This attitude was suppressed by the defeat of 1926 and by the demoralisation arising out of the depression. After 1926, there was no longer any potential for a strategy of direct action.

With this question resolved, the debate in the 1930s centred more around the actual policies to be pursued than had previously been the case. The left, in the 1930s, was more articulate and more politically sophisticated. But it did not appeal to extra-parliamentary forces as allies in the campaign for socialist policies. Cripps, for example, distanced himself very firmly from the militant actions of the unemployed. The left

of the 1930s was rooted in the constituency Labour Parties, and firmly committed to the parliamentary strategy. The debate was about how far reformism in a parliamentary context could be stretched. The left began, hesitantly at first, and then more boldly, to challenge the commitment of the Labour Party to consensus politics and to such concepts as the national interest, and to pose class interests as an alternative basis on which to formulate policy. In other words, they were moving towards independent working class politics, and the United Front campaign was the culmination of this trend.

But the movement towards independent class politics was still-born. It foundered on the rocks of opposition from the parliamentary and trades union leadership, and its own failure to mobilise mass support. The United Front campaign was superceded within a year by the much more nebulous, less class-orientated, Popular Front campaign. A number of factors contributed to this retreat. Firstly, the situation in Europe progressively worsened, making the problem of resistance to fascism even more urgent. Secondly, the Communist Party, in response to a change in Comintern policy, began to advocate a Popular Front.

But thirdly, the retreat from the United Front to the Popular Front, particularly among the left in Bristol, was a logical one, for a parliamentary-orientated party, even a militant reformist one, is ill-placed to act as the focus for the development of independent class politics, which must necessarily have a base within a mobilisation of the working class; such a mobilisation did not occur during the 1930s. Without this, the development of independent working class politics was inevitably still-born, and the left fell back on a more militant version of the consensus politics which they had been attacking.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Labour's fortunes in Parliamentary elections in Bristol, 1910 - 1935[1]

1. January 1910 General Election

Bristol East

Hobhouse (Lib)	6804	Labour did not contest the other three divisions; nor did it offer a candidate in the December 1910 election.
Batten (C)	4033	
Sheppard (Lab)	2255	
Maj.	2771	

2. 1918 General Election

Bristol Central (New Constituency)

Inskip (Co. Unionist)	12,232
Bevin (Lab)	7,137
Maj.	5,095

Bristol East

Britton (Co. Lib)	9434
Bateman (Lab)	8135
Hobhouse (Lib)	1447
Maj.	1299

Bristol North

Gange (Co. Lib)	11400
Kaylor (Lab)	5007
Potter (Nat. Party)	2520
Maj.	6393

1. F. S. Craig, British Parliamentary Results, 1918-1945 (Glasgow 1969).

Bristol South

Davies (Co. Lib)		13761
Lewis (Lab)		6409
	Maj.	7352

Bristol West — No Contest

3. **1922 General Election**

Bristol Central

Inskip (C)		15568
Thomson (Lab)		12303
	Maj.	3265

Bristol East

Morris (N.L.)		13910
Bateman (Lab)		13759
	Maj.	151

Bristol North

Col. Guest (N.L.)		17495
Ayles (Lab)		9567
	Maj.	7928

Bristol South

Rees (N.L.)		16199
Vaughan (Lab)		12560
	Maj.	3549

Bristol West — No Labour candidate

4. 1923 General Election

Bristol Central		
Inskip (C)		14386
Walters (Lab)		11932
	Maj.	2454
Bristol East		
Baker (Lab)		14824
Morris (L)		12788
	Maj.	2036
Bristol North		
Ayles (Lab)		10483
Guest (L)		8770
Potter (C)		8643
	Maj.	1663
Bristol South		
Rees (L)		15233
Vaughan (Lab)		13701
	Maj.	1534
Bristol West		No Contest

5. 1924 General Election

Bristol Central		
Inskip (C)		17177
Lovat Fraser (Lab)		14018
	Maj.	3159

5. Bristol East

Baker (Lab)		16920
Magge (L)		12143
	Maj.	4777

Bristol North

Col. Guest (L)		17799
Ayles (Lab)		12319
	Maj.	5480

Bristol South

Rees (L)		16722
Vaughan (Lab)		15702
	Maj.	1020

Bristol West

Gibbs (C)		23574
Giles (Lab)		6276
	Maj.	17298

6. February 1928 Bristol West by election

Culverwell (C)		16970
Lady C. Annesley (Lab)		7702
Marcy (L)		4996
	Maj.	9268

7. 1929 General Election

Bristol Central

Alpass (Lab)		20749
Inskip (C)		16524
	Maj.	4225

Bristol East

Baker (Lab)		24197
Gordon-Spencer (L)		12576
	Maj.	11621

Bristol North

Ayles (Lab)		18619
Guest (Ind. L)		12932
Skelton (L)		6713
	Maj.	5687

Bristol South

Walken (Lab)		23591
Rees (L)		18194
	Maj.	5397

Bristol West

Culverwell (C)		25416
Annesley (Lab)		11961
Marcy (Lib)		9909
	Maj.	13455

8. January 1931 Bristol East by election

Cripps (Lab)		19261
Chapman Walker (C)		7937
Baker (L)		4010
	Maj.	11324

9. 1931 General Election

Bristol Central

Apsley (C)		22311
Alpass (Lab)		15143
	Maj.	7168

Bristol East

Cripps (Lab)		19435
Spreull (C)		19006
	Maj.	411

Bristol North

Bernays (L)		27040
Ayles (Lab)		13826
	Maj.	13214

Bristol South

N. K. Lindsay (C)		26694
Walkden (Lab)		17774
	Maj.	9520

Bristol West

Culverwell (C)		43264
White (Lab)		8875
	Maj.	34389

10. 1935 General Election

Bristol Central

Apsley (C)		15774
Alpass (Lab)		14258
	Maj.	1516

Bristol East

Cripps (Lab)		22009
Church (Nat. Lab.)		15126
	Maj.	6883

Bristol North

Bernays (L (NL))		20977
Ayles (Lab)		16149
	Maj.	4828

Bristol South

Walkden (Lab)		22586
Lindsay (C)		20153
Skelton (L)		2090
	Maj.	2433

Bristol West

Culverwell (C)		36820
Williams (Lab)		15058
	Maj.	21762

APPENDIX II

Bristol's Working Population

Table showing Main Occupational Groups

Occupational Group		YEAR 1911		1921		1931	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1.	Mining & Quarrying	2132	-	1726	-	675	30
2.	Metal Workers	7468	206	12795	341	12326	837
3.	Makers of Textile Goods & Dress	6869	11061	4468	8335	3947	5854
3a	(Boot and Shoe)	(3648)	(1089)	(2358)	(809)	(2008)	(789)
4.	Wood and Furniture	4472	390	6582	282	3515	353
5.	Printing & Paper	3658	4438	3611	5028	5376	4264
6.	Building	8993	-	7421	34	9417	77
7.	Transport & Communication	18727	-	19885	507	16339	446
8.	Food, drink & Tobacco	12956	8206	4820	6017	10549	10506
9.	Clerks	5358	1534	7336	4954	9984	6587
10.	Commercial & Financial	4625	-	12686	5725	23602	9706
10a	,(Shop Assistants)			(3196)	(4011)	(4077)	(4633)
11.	Domestic Indoor Service	1967	12238	3028	15530	4157	14955
	Total Occupied	104456	59156	115617	58486	128445	60016

N.B.

These figures are taken from the Census Reports, 1911, 1921, 1931. They are subject to changes in classification. Thus Shop Assistants, which appeared separately in 1921 and 1931, were included among workers in other industries in earlier reports, and therefore inflate the figures in, for example, the food, drink and tobacco, and textile and dress, groups for 1911.

APPENDIX III

Biographical Notes on Leading Labour Movement Activists in Bristol

Ayles: Walter Henry[1] (1879-1953)

B. 1879. South Lambeth, London; Educ. elementary; At age 15, apprenticed in locomotive workshops; Prominent in A.S.E. in Birmingham area, 1903-1910 (1903-7 Birmingham District Sec. A.S.E.); Member, Birmingham Board of Guardians, 1904-07; Prominent in I.L.P. in Birmingham; 1910 appointed Gen. Sec., Bris. I.L.P.; Largely responsible for building I.L.P. to position of strength in local politics. Entered City Council for Easton Ward, 1912; Retained seat until 1922, and after short absence from council returned for St. Phillip and Jacob South Ward; Chairman of Bris. L.R.C. 1915-18, and Bristol B.L.P. 1918-1923. On N.A.C. of I.L.P., 1912-27; In war, a prominent Conscientious objector; Founder-member of N.C.F., spent 2½ years in 7 prisons: Chairman of Wakefield Absolutists: Released in 1919, and returned to Bristol: Adopted as Lab. cand. Bris. N., and won seat 1923; Defeated 1924: fought and won again, 1929; Lost 1931, and again 1935; After 1926, little contact with Bristol Lab. movement; Increasingly involved in No-More War Movement and the other pacifist bodies; 1945 returned to Parlt. for Southall; Died 1953; Quaker; Noted pamphleteer locally and nationally in I.L.P.

Bateman: Luke Henry (1873-?)

B. 1873. Bris.; Educ. elementary; G.W.R. Stationary Engineman; one-time pres. Bris. J.C./N.U.R. and Pres. Bris. and S.W. District Cttee, N.U.R. Member, Bris. East I.L.P. Unsuccessful Lab. Candidate. Bris.

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1. For a more detailed biographical account of Ayles, see the author's entry in the forthcoming Vol. 3 of Bellamy and Saville, Dictionary of Labour Biography.

East 1918, and 1922, and Monmouth, 1924; Unsuccessful Lab. cand. Bris. Mun. elections, Stapleton Ward, 1926-28; and successful 1929, 1932 and 1935; Lost seat in 1938.

Berriman: Frederick (1879-?)

Educ. Elem: Compositor; Pres. Bris. T.A. 1914-16, 1922-26; Vice-Pres. Bris. T.C. 1920-25; Ch. Bris. I.L.P. 1913-16; Pres. Bris. B.L.P., 1924-28; Gen. Sec., Bris. I.L.P., from 1925 until after disaffiliation from Lab. Party in 1932; Served 2 years hard labour as war resister, 1917-19; Councillor, Bedminster West Ward, from 1927 until after war.

Brown; George William (1880-?)

B. Hull; Educ. Elem. & Central Labour College; Loco-driver; member of N.U.R.; served as delegate to N.U.R. and Labour party conferences; Local Organising Sec. of N.U.R. from 1912; Acting-President, Bristol L.R.C., 1916-18; President, Bristol T.C., 1927; Councillor, St. Phillip and Jacob South Ward, 1918-1920; Member of Plebs League.

Burgess: Albert Whitfield Stone (1884-?)

B. Bristol; Clerk; from 1921, Group Sec. Clerical and Supervisory Section, T. & G.W.U. Area No. 5; joined I.L.P. in 1910; in 1918 founder-member of Bristol North C.L.P.; Chairman of North C.L.P. in 1920s and Vice-Chairman of Bristol B.L.P.; Councillor, Stapleton Ward, 1919-25, and St. George East Ward, 1926-29; Alderman, 1929; J.P., 1934 Lord Mayor, 1939-40; Member of Hyndman Club; Local lay preacher in United Methodist Church, Kingswood Circuit.

Clothier: F.F. (? - 1956)

Painter and decorator; Local Secretary, Painters and Decorators T.U.: Member of I.L.P. before 1914; Councillor, Easton Ward, 1913-1929; during war, member of Local Tribunal to consider appeals of Conscientious objectors; J.P. 1927; Alderman, 1929; Lord Mayor, 1930-31.

Cox: Arthur William (1885-?)

B. Orlingbury, Northants; Educ. Elem.; one-time Sec. Educ. Dept., Northants Co-op Soc; one-time organising Sec., Daventry C.L.P.; came to Bristol 1921, to take up post of Sec., Central Educ. Cttee, and Political Cttee, Bristol Co-op Society; Prominent speaker at local Labour rallies; Member of E.C., Bristol B.L.P.; Councillor, Easton Ward, from 1927; Leader, Lab. Group, Bristol City Council from 1938; On Central Educ. Cttee, Co-op Union and 1931, Nat. Pres. Co-op Mens Guild.

Curle: John (? - 1928)

B. Kewstoke, Somerset. Carpenter, and one-time local sec. of Building Trades Cttee. of A.S.C.J.: for many years, sec. of Bristol T.C.; joint hon-sec. Bristol Board of Conciliation and Arbitration in 1890s; 1893, J.P., 1896-1904, Labour councillor St. Paul's Ward; 1904-10, Alderman; President, Bedminster Industrial Co-operative Society, 1899-1900; 1910-21, Manager, Bath Labour Exchange; thereafter, set up in business as builder; 1923, elected Councillor, Bedminster East; 1927 Lord Mayor; associated with Manchester Unity of Oddfellows; Freemason, d. 18 Nov. 1928.

Donovan: John (1892-?)

B. Swansea; worked in Swansea docks, and joined D.W.R. & G.W.U. at age of 14; during war, served in army; after war, lay member of E.C. of union, and 1921, when T.G.W.U. formed, member of its Docks Group National Committee; 1925 appointed Union District Secretary, West Cornwall; member of Falmouth Borough Council; 1932, appointed Regional Secretary Area No. 3, Bristol; prominent in B.L.P. in late 1930s; Councillor, St. Phillip North Ward, from 1938.

Garmston: James (1880-?)

B. Bristol; Educ. elem; worked as miner in South Wales, and one-time Assistant Lodge Secretary in South Wales Miners' Federation; returned to Bristol and assisted Bevin in organising Carters into Dockers' Union, 1910; first branch sec., Carters' branch, and appointed local official of union, 1911; 1916, District Secretary, and Regional Sec., Area No. 3, T.G.W.U., 1922-1932; Member of Hyndman Club.

Giles: Matthew (1866-1956)

B. Pontypridd, S. Wales; educ. Private School and 2 years under London School Board; 1886 in London joined S.D.F.; 1901, joined Workers' Union in South Wales; by this time, member of I.L.P.; 1906, appointed Divisional organiser, W.U. in South Wales, and responsible for rapid growth there in pre-war years; 1916, moved to Bristol as South West District Organiser, and helped establish W.U. in Bristol area; active in Bristol Socialist Society in 1920s; 1924, first ever Lab. candidate in Bristol West; 1925-1934, Councillor, St. Phillip and Jacob North Ward; 1927 J.P.; 1929, W.U. amalgamated with T.G.W.U., Giles taken on to local staff of T.G.W.U.; retired from union in 1933.

Gill: Charles Richard (1871-1956)

B. Bedminster, Bristol; Educ. elem. and tech; started work at 11 in mines; for 16 years General Treasurer, B.M.A.; 1921, Agent of B.M.A.; Member I.L.P.; Member, General Management Cttee, Bristol Co-op. Soc. 1920; Councillor, Bedminster West Ward, 1922-1931, Bedminster East, 1933-1936; Alderman, 1936; J.P. 1934.

Hennessy: W. Harold n.d.

Warehouseman; member of N.U.D.A.W.; member of I.L.P., and Bristol East C.L.P.; long connection with W.E.A.; served in armed forces in war; Councillor, St. George West Ward 1921-29; Alderman, 1929-1934; Councillor,

St. George West, 1934-1936; Alderman 1936; leading light of left-wing of local movement; active in helping unemployed in 1930s; ran own rent court in inter-war period to help with tenants problems.

Lewis: Thomas Charles (1871-1941)

B. Worcs; Educ., elem; bricklayer; member of O.B.S.; Bristol branch treasurer, O.B.S. 1904-10, Chairman 1911-12; Sec. Bristol T.C., Bristol District Organiser, Gen. Workers' Section, Dockers' Union, 1916-22; Financial Sec., Area No. 3, T.G.W.U., 1922-1934; Member of Bristol Board of Guardians, from 1906, and Chairman, 1926-27; Lab. candidate, Bristol South, 1918 General Election; J.P. 1927; Member of Hyndman Club and B.S.S.

Milton: John James n.d.

B. Burnham on Sea; came to Bristol as a child; Educ. elem; first job in boot factory; then served 7 year apprenticeship in Silk Hat trade; member of Silk Hatters' T.U. and later Pres. Bris. Branch G. & G.L.U.; member and one-time Sec. Bristol East I.L.P.; Councillor St. George East Ward, 1913-1929; alderman, 1929; J.P. 1921, Lord Mayor, 1937-38; District manager of Planet Assurance Society, and 1937, of Co-op Insurance Soc; keen sportsman; member of Redfield Brotherhood and St. George Adult School.

Neft: Raphael (? -1928)

B. Wilkomir, Lithuania; dentist; educ. in Germany, Paris and London; practiced in S. Wales; a Marxist of Bernstein school; propagandist and publicist; Lecturer in Marxist economics and sociology for W.E.A. and N.C.L.C. in Llanelly; Member, Welsh Divisional Council, I.L.P.; Lab. Parlt. candidate, Weston-Super-Mare, 1924; came to Bristol 1925; set up educ. classes for young socialists; first editor Bristol Labour Weekly, 1926-27. Publications: 'Light on the Levy'; 'The Class Struggle'; 'Chunks of Socialism'; 'Riches, Seed - Wealth, and Capital'.

Parker: Edwin Henry (1888-1945)

B. Bristol; Educ., elem; engineer; one time shop steward; one-time Financial Secretary, Dockers' Social and Educational Council, Bristol; full-time Gen. Sec., Bris. T. & L.C., 1920-1944; Councillor, St. Paul's Ward, 1922-1936; Alderman, 1936; member I.L.P.; keen sportsman; President Bristol Workers' Sports Association; Free Churchman.

Pheysey; Mrs. L. M.

B. London; came to Bris., 1914, with introduction from Adult Schools Union and Brotherhood Movement; one time Chairwoman of Joint Social Services Cttee. of these 2 bodies; 1920, 2nd woman councillor in Bristol when elected for St. Phillip and Jacob North Ward; 1927, J.P.; 1932, Alderman; active in Mothers' Union and Bris. Women's Temperance Association; active in W.E.A. and Co-op. Women's Guild.

Reade: R. St. John

Son of old Etonian; Educ. Radley and Magdalen Coll. Oxford; served in War in France with B.E.F. organising recreational activities under Y.M.C.A. auspices; after war, travelling sec. with Christian Social Crusade in Europe and America; came to Bristol 1921 as Assistant Master of Modern Languages, Clifton College; founder-member and one-time Chairman Bristol West C.L.P.; Sec. of Teachers' Lab. League, Bris. branch; contested number of municipal elections, unsuccessfully, 1928-1933, and elected councillor for Horfield Ward, 1936-38; active member Socialist League in 1930s; re-entered City Council after war, and served many years as Chairman of education cttee.

Rogers: H.E. (1896 -)

B. Redfield Bristol; Educ., elem. and Merchant Venturers' Technical College; apprenticed carpenter; member I.L.P.; during war, refused active service and engaged on work of national importance; founder-member first sec. Bris. East C.L.P.; full-time agent and sec. 1921 until entered Civil Service in 1940; Councillor, St. George East, 1932-1940; prominent member of Socialist League, and supporter of Cripps in Campaigns for United Front and Popular Front; one of group of Bris. East C.L.P. members expelled from Lab. party in 1942 for breaking political truce and supporting Jenny Lee's candidature in Bristol Central by-election; after war remained in Civil Service in Cardiff; still active in Labour Party in Bristol South-East; last elected councillor in 1972.

Sennington: Alfred Arthur (1871-?)

B. Wellington, India; Educ. mostly in army schools in India; tailors' cutter; member of Tailors and Garment Workers Union, and one-time local Secretary; one-time President, Bristol T.C.; first President Bristol L.R.C.; Councillor, Easton Ward, 1908-20; Alderman, 1920; Lord Mayor, 1923-24; during war, member Conscientious Objectors Appeals Tribunal. One-time President, City and County of Bristol Mutual Benefit Society.

Shallard: George[1] (1877-1958)

B. Crew's Hole, Bristol; son of a baker; very religious, chapel-going family; unorthodox Methodist lay preacher for 60 years in Kingswood Circuit; from 1905 pres. of Crew's Hole Methodist Bible Class; Educ. elem; at 13 apprenticed to letterpress printing trade; at 24 set up own business; member of East Bris. Liberal Association, and active in temperance movement; then joined I.L.P. through common opposition to Boer War; Conscientious Objector in war; founder-member, Bris. East C.L.P.; Councillor, St. George East Ward, 1921-1936; alderman 1936; J.P. 1927.

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1. For a more detailed biographical account of Shallard, see: Bellamy and Saville, op.cit. (1972), Vol. 1, pp.295-6.

Sheppard: Frank[1] (1863-1956)

B. Weston-Super-Mare; orphaned at age of 9; Educ., elem; apprenticed bootmaker; moved to Bristol and joined N.U.B.S.O. 1883; 1884 elected to General Council of Union to represent Bristol district; President Bris. T.C., 1893; served on local boot trade arbitration boards; joined S.D.F. in 1887 and several years Hon. Sec. of B.S.S. - Bevin regarded Sheppard as his 'political father'; 1893-99 Councillor, St. Paul's Ward; 1904 re-elected; 1910 first Labour alderman; 1912 J.P.; 1894-1906 Lab. member, Board of Guardians, Jan. 1910, contested Bristol East in general election without success; earned respect outside Lab. circles for his moderate views, and awarded Hon. M.A. by Bris. University, 1912; during war served on Local Tribunal Recruiting Cttee, Food Control Cttee; 1917-18, first Labour Lord Mayor of Bristol played leading part in B.A.I.R. 1917-1919, and moved closer to views of those who favoured continuing Labour participation in Coalition Govt.; 1918 General Election prepared to contest Bris. Central as Labour candidate with Coalition support, but forced to withdraw when union and Bristol Central C.L.P. refused to support him; replaced by Bevin; 1918, awarded O.B.E.; 1930 M.B.E.; continued as alderman and leader of Labour Group on City Council until November 1938; active on several local charitable and educational bodies; a methodist lay-preacher.

Tothill: Miss Mabel Caroline n.d.

Came to Bristol 1896; previously a social worker in Hull; in Bristol an elem. School Visitor, concerned with welfare of small children; active in University Settlement, Barton Hill; during war, organised relief work for women in connection with Prince of Wales Relief Fund; one-time chairwoman, Bris. East branch, National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies;

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1. For a more detailed biographical account of Sheppard, see the author's entry in the forthcoming Vol. 3, of: Bellamy and Saville, op.cit.

active in W.E.A., Adult Schools, and Folk House; member of I.L.P.; first woman councillor Bristol City Council, 1920-21, for St. Paul's Ward; member, Society of Friends.

White: F.E. (1874-1933)

Son of Master Plasterer; entered same trade at 13; full-time sec. Bristol Branch, N.A.O.P.G. & C.W. 1922; member of that Union's N.E.C., and National Pres. 1925; one-time pres., Bris. T.C.; councillor Bed. B, 1921-24, 1925-1933; Lab. parlt. candidate, Stroud 1929, and Bristol West, 1931; active in Brotherhood movement.

Whitefield: William[1] (1850-1926)

B. Burradon, Northumberland; started work in mines at 10; later joined army, bought out by aunt, after which served some time in S. Shields Police force, before returning to mines as hewer; attended evening classes to improve education; active in Northumberland Miners' Association, and moved to Bristol in 1889 to take up post of full-time Agent; member of N.E.C. of M.F.G.B., in 1894, from 1898-1904, and again in 1915; attended many international conferences on behalf of British miners; active in local lab. politics, serving on local School Board, 1901-03, and 1906, elected to City Council for St. George East; 1919 alderman; 1921, J.P.; he retired from job as local miners' Agent in August, 1921; a Spiritualist by religion.

Williams: Frederick Charles (1877 - n.d.)

B. Bris; tailors' cutter by trade; joined Tailors' and Garment Workers' Union in 1897; member of union N.E.C. 1921, and Nat. President, 1931; served on Ready Made and Wholesale Bespoke Tailoring Trade Board; member of I.L.P. and Co-op; local union representative on Bris. East

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1. For a more detailed biographical account of Whitefield, see: Bellamy and Saville, op.cit., (1974), Vol. 2, pp.403-4.

and South C.L.P.s' General Councils; delegate to Bris. B.L.P.; councillor, Bedminster East Ward, 1929-1938; Church of England Church Warden and Chairman of C. of E. Men's Society.

Winchester; W. n.d.

Photographer, self-employed; member I.L.P., and Bristol East C.L.P.; Councillor St. George West Ward, 1919-32; Alderman 1932; Lord Mayor 1938.

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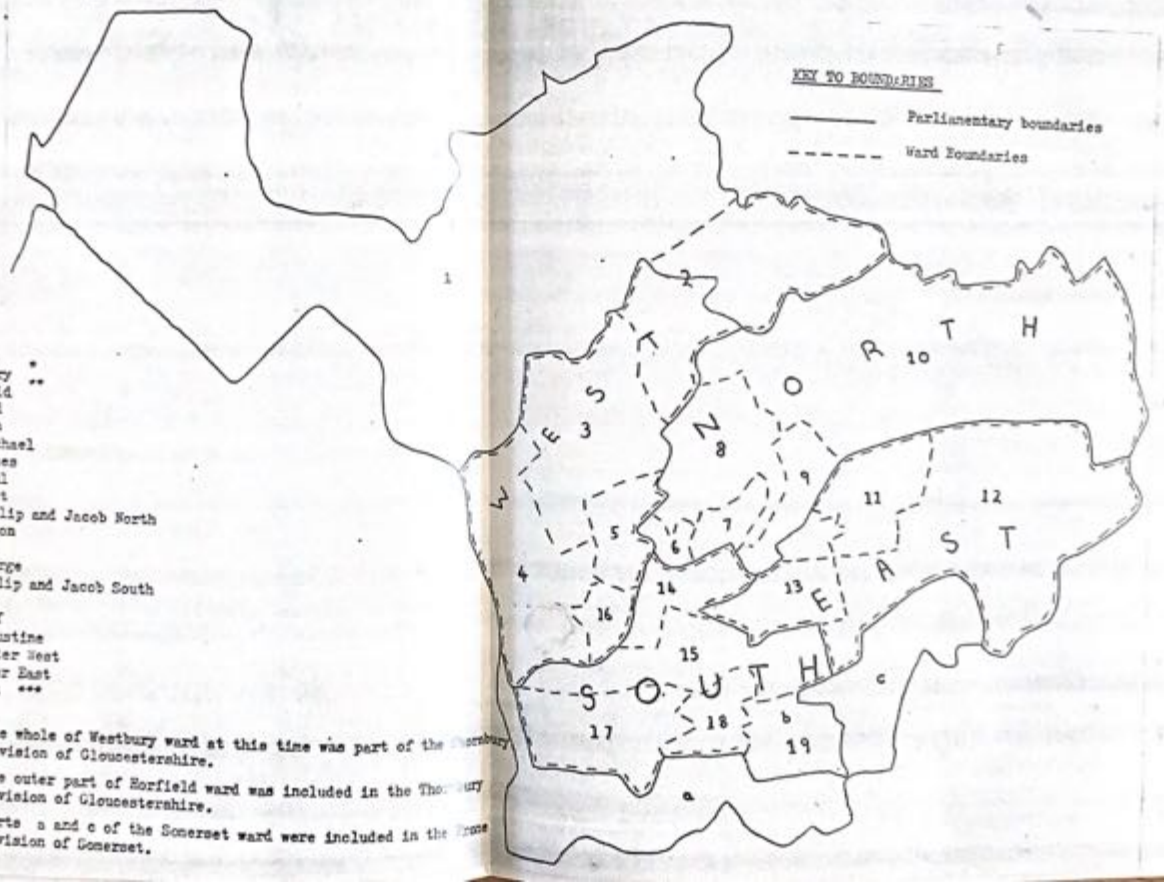
Map of Bristol , showing Parliamentary constituency and municipal ward boundaries, as amended, 1904.



KEY TO WARDS.

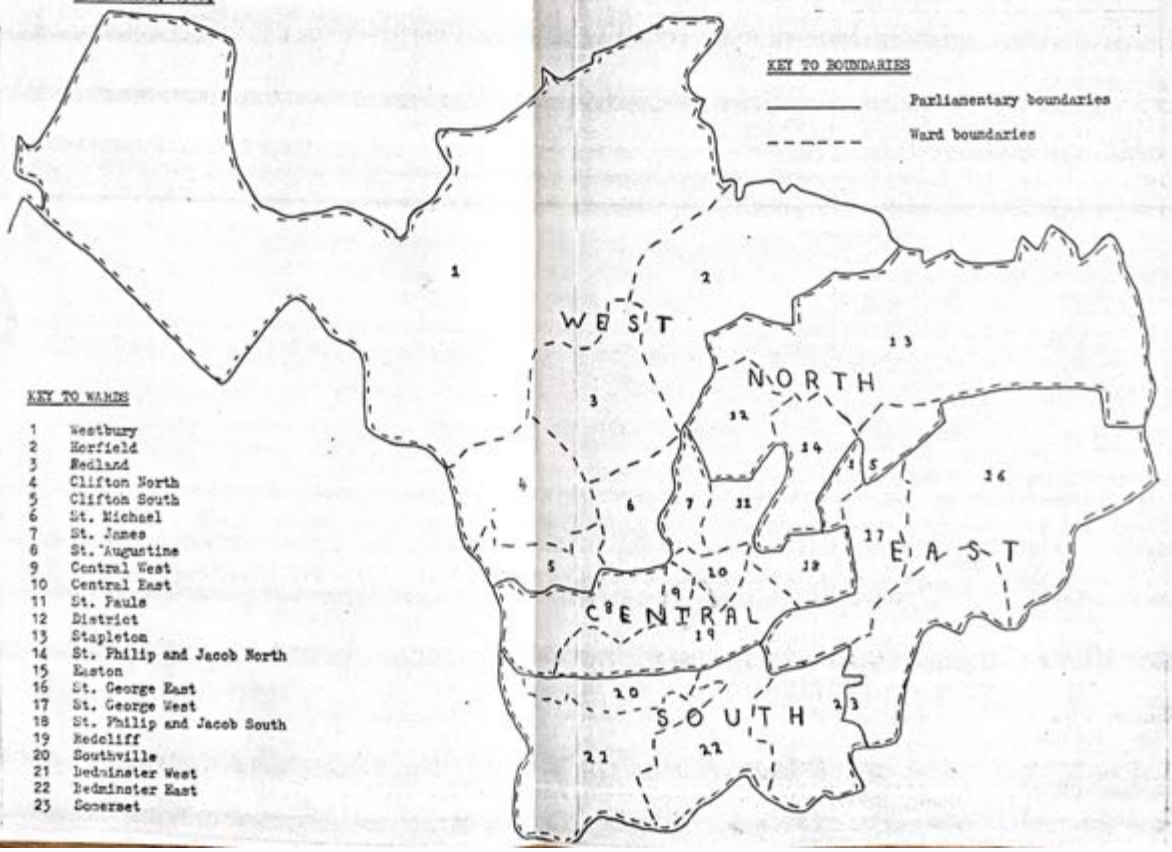
1	Westbury	*
2	Horfield	**
3	Redland	
4	Clifton	
5	St. Michael	
6	St. James	
7	St. Paul	
8	District	
9	St. Philip and Jacob North	
10	Stapleton	
11	Easton	
12	St. George	
13	St. Philip and Jacob South	
14	Central	
15	Redcliff	
16	St. Augustine	
17	Bedminster West	
18	Bedminster East	
19	Somerset	***

N.B. * The whole of Westbury ward at this time was part of the Thornbury Division of Gloucestershire.

** The outer part of Horfield ward was included in the Thornbury Division of Gloucestershire.

*** Parts a and c of the Somerset ward were included in the Frome Division of Somerset.

Map of Bristol, showing Parliamentary constituency and municipal ward boundaries, as amended, 1918.



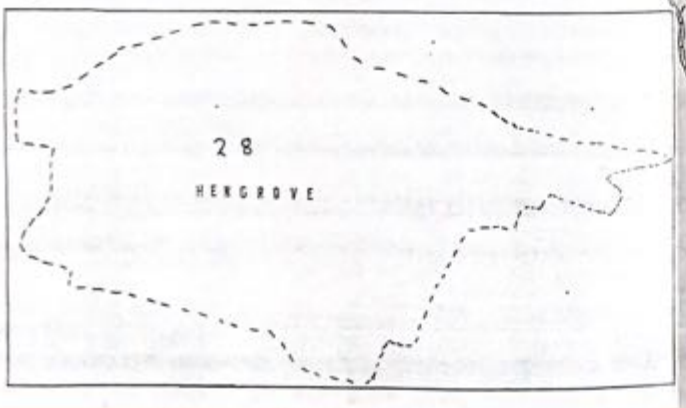
KEY TO WARDS

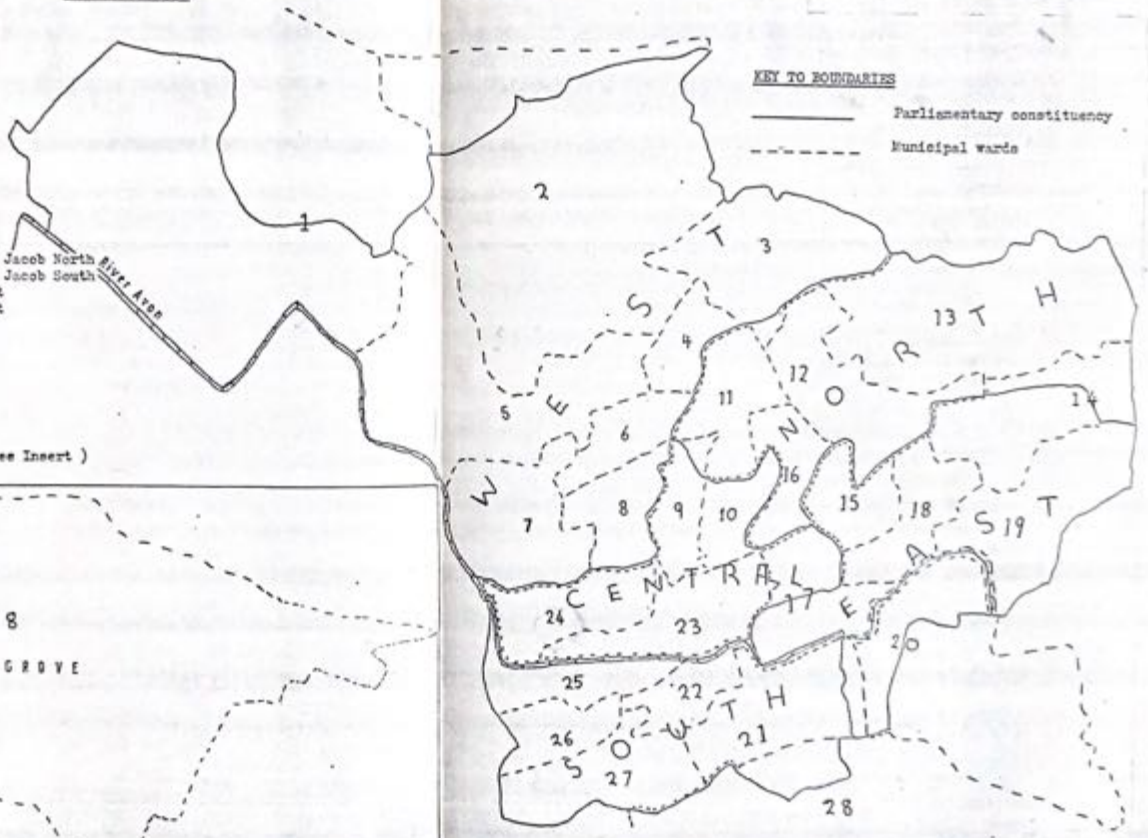
1 Westbury
2 Horfield
3 Redland
4 Clifton North
5 Clifton South
6 St. Michael
7 St. James
8 St. Augustine
9 Central West
10 Central East
11 St. Pauls
12 District
13 Stapleton
14 St. Philip and Jacob North
15 Easton
16 St. George East
17 St. George West
18 St. Philip and Jacob South
19 Redcliff
20 Southville
21 Bedminster West
22 Bedminster East
23 Somerset

Map of Bristol, showing Parliamentary constituency and municipal ward boundaries, as amended 1936.

KEY TO WARDS

1 Avon
2 Westbury
3 Horfield
4 Bishopston
5 Durdham
6 Redland
7 Clifton
8 St. Michael
9 St. James
10 St. Paul
11 District
12 Eastville
13 Stapleton
14 Hillfields
15 Easton
16 St. Philip and Jacob North
17 St. Philip and Jacob South
18 St. George West
19 St. George East
20 Brislington
21 Knowle
22 Windmill Hill
23 Redcliff
24 St. Augustine
25 Southville
26 Bedminster
27 Somerset
28 Hengrove (See Insert)





KEY TO BOUNDARIES

Parliamentary constituency

Municipal wards